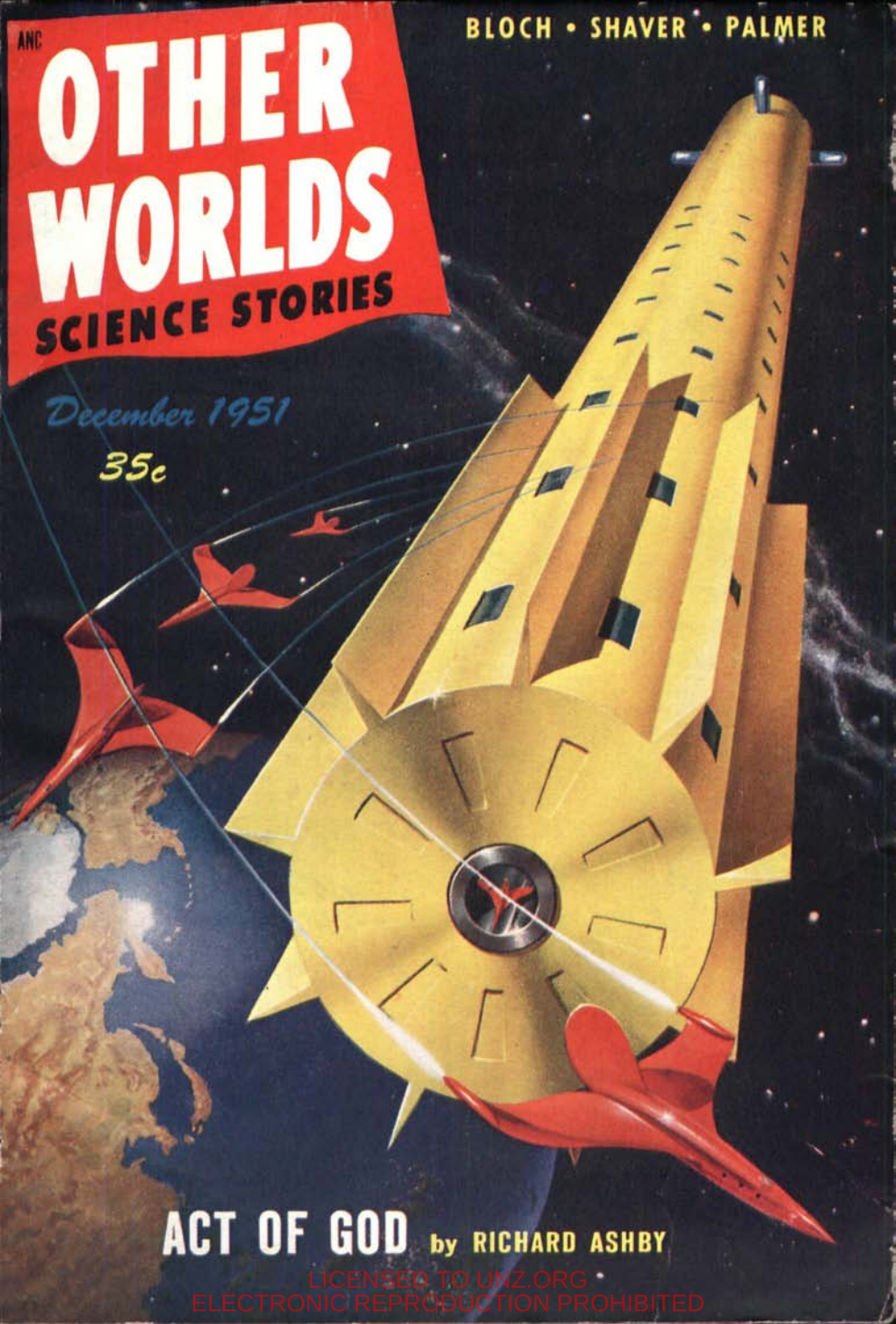

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OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

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EDITORIAL

FOUR years ago we discovered another of the many writers we can claim as our own discoveries in the twenty-two years of our editorial experience. He had never written a word when we asked him to write a story. He did one called "Murder In a Macaroni Factory". It certainly was a stinker. But we asked him to do another. We asked him to do a novel. Then we began advertising it in *Amazing Stories*. We even had three-color back plates made, heralding it as one of the greatest novels of science fiction history. We bet, in fact, on a blind pig. We won. That story was "So Shall Ye Reap" by Rog Phillips.

Today, Rog Phillips is recognized as one of America's top science fiction writers.

But, we are going to let you in on a little secret. Up to now, we have considered that Mr. Phillips was a novice, an amateur, a beginner. We have been waiting for him to become a professional. We have been waiting for him to become fully developed. Last year we decided that one more novel would do it. We took him to coffee and talked for more than two hours. We gave him, in our estimation, the toughest assignment we have ever handed out to any science fiction writer. We once more gave him a title, the outline of a plot and a free hand in its development, except that it must cover the subject we had in mind and do it completely and intelligently.

For more than a year Rog has been struggling with that novel. Once he had it finished, then tore up the last 21,000 words and did them over. His other writing almost completely stopped during this period. He himself said he was almost on

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the verge of complete defeat. This was a job a really great literary figure might find a mind-shattering task. But we're glad to announce that he did it. We have just finished reading the last word of this 76,000 word novel. It is called "These Are My Children" and it takes in a plot concept never before seen in science fiction. Further, it is a masterpiece of literary construction, of perfect plotting, of genuine characterization, and of plausible and unequivocal development. Its ending is a terrific smash, and one that will leave the reader with his own mind at a peak of interest, and on the road to a world of thoughtful conjecture, and of wonder, and even of awe.

Right here is where some of you who know us will say: "Ray Palmer is blowing horns again!" Yes, Ray Palmer is known for the way he blows horns. He's used and abused every adjective in the dictionary, and it's characteristic of him to "sound off" at every opportunity. But once in awhile he gets serious about something and the steam he blows off is white hot.

We're white hot about "THESE ARE MY CHILDREN" in capital letters. And we want you to get an indelible pencil and write it on the end of your nose so your newsdealer can see it: "I want a copy of OTHER WORLDS reserved for me from now on—because Rog Phillips has *finally* written the 'great novel' of his career!"

Remember what we said about giving you really good stories, even if they ran into impossible wordage? Well, this one's 76,000 words, and it will *necessarily* appear in two parts. Why not make sure you get it all by subscribing right now? You can get OTHER WORLDS for 25c per issue that way and save $1.20 on a

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Malcolm Smith

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twelve-issue subscription.

Speaking of serials, we have in mind, rather toyfully at the moment, novel of 250,000 words. Yes, a quarter of a million words! We realize fully that it would take a full year's issues to run it serially, but even at that, we wouldn't be establishing a precedent; remember (if you're old enough) the "Lemurian Documents"? In the old *Amazing Stories*. Actually, they were presented in the same manner, with each installment complete in itself, but actually it is one unit, one story. How about it, readers—could you stand the gaff of a year's suspense? Actually, though, along with our policy of giving you the best we can get, it's a must that we give you this one. We'll think about it deeply . . .

And now, to get down to editorializing—we've done some work at streamlining OTHER WORLDS. With this issue, and following issues, you'll find some innovations. A revamped makeup, new appearance and some new features. Elimination of run-backs, more cartoons, and a lot of things to come. All this is in line with the new stature of science fiction, which is invading the film industry, television, and general magazines to an amazing degree. In short, science fiction has finally reached its crest, general popularity. From now on it will be a flood-tide, and the beginning of specialization. OTHER WORLDS intends to continue to pioneer in the field, and to present something just ahead of the tide. In short, if you read OTHER WORLDS, you'll be on a surf board riding the crest of the wave.

Along that line, the story in this issue by Richard Ashby called "Act of God" is such an advance. We think Ashby has one of the most difficult subjects in the world, and given us a thriller that would do credit to Cecil B. DeMille. You'll recognize the tremendous stature of the "props" in this story, but you'll find that they do not overshadow a terrific idea, and a splendid development of that idea. This is an example of unhampered thinking and even more unhampered writing. It will prove there are no taboos in OTHER WORLDS, if that taboo means rejection of a good story.

Just what does "story-telling" imply, in addition to simple entertainment? In ancient times, it was a method of teaching; today we seem to resent being "taught" so subtly, so "against our wills." Also, and not as ancient, it was a matter of "moralizing". Every story had to have a moral. But today, we seem to gag at the idea that somebody must take underhand pokes at our conduct, and try to reform us by sly propaganda. More lately, stories had a "preaching" atmosphere, and ethics were instilled into the reader by author-to-reader soapboxing. Naturally, we "moderns" don't like to be preached at. But what has happened even more lately? We've come to a story-telling that is pure propaganda. In short, we are being "indoctrinated" with isms and politics, and even with herd behavior. We are being led around by the nose. And like fools, we are playing directly into the hands of the propaganda (much of which is unwitting, because, the writers are merely imitating a current trend, or a popular fad). The fad today is lies. In the press, in politics, in such things as "iron curtains". Just what is an "iron curtain"? It is, briefly, a curtain of lies to conceal what lies behind. We are playing up to such "curtains" by trying to reject *anything* which seems to ask us to think!

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We call it "playing politics". We say we don't like a story because it "plays politics". Because it makes a controversial statement. Because it challenges a status quo. We have come to a regrettable condition where our authors must carefully avoid subjects because the reader may : 1) say we are trying to influence his thinking; 2) accuse us of moralizing, implying that his morals are okay as they are; 3) propagandizing; 4) preaching; 5) "plugging" a doctrine or an ism.

For instance, a story which projects into the future a policy of our government (or a fictionalized government, but with the inference obvious) such as preparing for atomic warfare (see Rog Phillips' "So Shall Ye Reap") and by taking the opposite tack from the current propaganda (all communications disseminating policy are propaganda) seems to "criticize" that preparation is immediately the object of loud abuse and the author is warned to "keep away" from such subjects.

Since when can't we humans stand up and debate? Since when is debate (taking the negative as well as the positive) an infringement on our free rights as thinkers? Since when isn't debate thinking?

Or ARE we sheep?

No, let's not limit the concepts our authors may use in the development of their fiction, because it challenges a factual status quo. If a fact cannot stand a challenge, it is not a fact! If a "way of life" of today cannot stand an alternative, then what is there in a "future"? And what is science fiction, if it is not "things to come"?

Let's not write letters to this magazine, or to others, flaying an author because he dares to express a variant opinion. Let's not say, as an army colonel once said to us: "Keep your nose clean." Let's not say: "Don't butt in on what doesn't concern you." There isn't anything in a cooperative world that doesn't concern *all* of us. As believers in our future, let's not, in our turn, reject the instrument called propaganda in a day when its use is so universal that the truth of *any* statement cannot be absolutely determined.

In short, let's drop this idea right now that we can't project the *present-fact* into *future fiction* without risking "concentration camp criticism". Let's not be so shy of the water that we back right into it!

We've noticed a furore of editorial argument as to which science fiction magazine is the "leader". Claims are made in three ways: 1) sales; 2) quality of stories; 3) subscriptions—and perhaps—4) makeup. Let's quote facts, not hot air. Top in sales: *Amazing Stories* (highest sale, 185,000 and presently about 110,000. Top in subscriptions: *Galaxy* says it is, but available figures show AS with about 1800 and OTHER WORLDS with 1000. Top in quality: personally we like OW; fan groups name *Astounding Science* Fiction, *Galaxy, The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction and* OTHER WORLDS in varied orders . . . with ASF having the best over-the-years record. The top magazine in makeup is *Galaxy* (cover paper): OTHER WORLDS (covers and readability and editorial originality); *Astounding* (overall format, proofreading); *Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures* (art directing, balance, readability, typography); and a tie between *Astounding, Amazing* and OTHER WORLDS for illustrations. But in the really important category, satisfied readers, OTHER WORLDS takes a back seat to nobody. *Rap*

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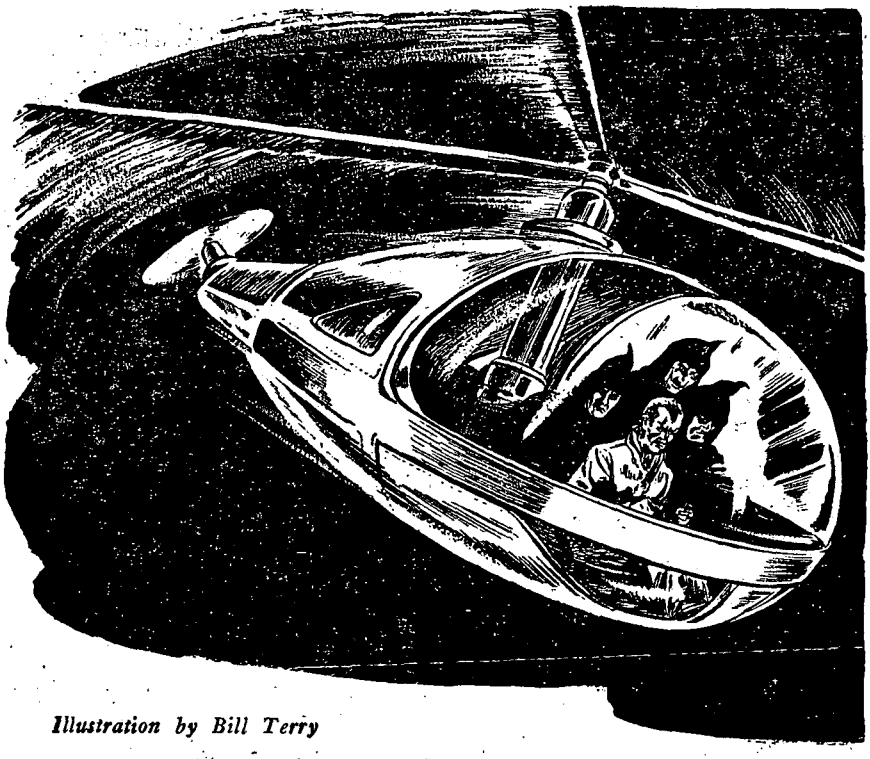

Illustration by Bill Terry

ACT of GOD

By Richard Ashby

FATHER Marek felt kindly toward the girl, for never in his parish career had such an experience come about; however it was something he'd felt might have happened to any good priest. She had rushed into his warm and gentle study, reddened and unpleasant with her tears and sorrow, and had begged that he come administer the rites of last comfort to her dying mother. And he had paused only long enough to fling on a coat against the bitter 1980 April of Los Angeles, and to collect the items specified by the church for last rites. Now, outside,

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One day people were known for one thing; the next they had completely reversed all opinions. Had their minds been *stolen* . . . ?

he opened the door of the cab and assisted the girl in. She was fourteen or sixteen, he supposed, and judging by her dress, one of a poor and large family. Father Marek slammed the door and settled himself.

"Ten thirty-five Larchmont," he called to the driver, and the cab shot out into the Wilshire traffic. But it kept heading the wrong way, and the girl was no longer crying. She snuggled into the upholstry at the far end of the seat and regarded him with a sly, confident, somehow shockingly older face. And when the car's windows began to turn opaque . . . and when he discovered that the driver refused to open the glass partition, Father Marek knew the first icy gusts of the horror which was to come.

* * *

General Peters excused himself bluntly and left the party through the tables to the back, past a serving bar, and into the men's room.

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Four men in tuxedos were waiting for him. One moved to block the entrance behind him, the other three closed in. For a man of sixty, he put up a pretty good defense, but against three he had hardly a chance. A rabbit punch from behind sent him reeling, and as he slumped two of his attackers caught him and the third broke a tiny vial and scratched the general's neck with it. The man at the door stepped out, looked both ways, then nodded. The three lugged the unconscious man out the back, boosted him into a waiting car, brushed themselves off and reentered the night spot. After seeing the car off the one who had acted as lookout followed after his companions. Inside, smiling and apologetic, he slipped through the gay chattering crowd and into a phone booth. When he reached his number he said but two words: "Hello, Grandmother."

* * *

She supposed that the man who so politely opened the door of the flier and assisted her in was a parking attendant, but she rather thought he shouldn't stare so . . . so carnivorously. Not that Ginny Harris wasn't worth staring at: Flaming hair cascading down her back, wide humorous month, her superb body in a shoulderless gown which sheathed her as revealingly as if it had been sprayed on. Stretching out a silken leg beneath the dash, she touched the starter. As the motor purred into life, she flashed a smile at the fellow.

"If you're through window-shopping, Buster, you can close the door."

'Buster' licked his lips nervously. "Your agent told me to give you this, Miss Harris."

"Ricky?" Ginny frowned and held out her hand. The man scratched her palm with a broken vial, then jumped in beside the cursing woman. As he swung the controls over to his side, she slumped against him, and her utterly unprintable whispering trailed off into silence. To make it look good he put her arm about his shoulders, slammed shut the door, and threw the blades into gear. A second later the coptor bounded off the C.B.S. parking roof and swung into the west-bound traffic above Wilshire.

* * *

And sixty miles away a man named Simon Letona considered these events as he strolled unhurriedly along an unpaved mountain road.

THE path from Lake Arrowhead led up a hill, and as he walked over the rise of the top Andrew Smith came out into a flood of brilliance from a huge orange moon. It was a much bigger moon, thought the exhausted man, than the one which last night had so pitilessly given him away, which had watched his desperate flight from wall to tree to boulder.

The lodge will feel good, he thought. There will be a fire in the stone hearth, there will be soft talk and laughter in the lounge, there

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will be a bath and skilled gentle hands to dress the wound in his side. And then to bed. Bed! He thought the word several times, mentally tasting the delicious ease of surrendering to the cool sheets, the soft pillow . . .

A rock rolled beneath his foot, and he stumbled, fell to one knee. Cursing softly, he pushed himself up from the rutted path and went on through the silent pines and moonlight.

When at last, an hour later, he reached the lodge, he paused before entering to comb his hair and to brush the worst of the mud from his trousers. Then smiling a smile he didn't feel, he entered, holding his lanky aching frame in an easy amble as he made for the bar. One or two people nodded his way from the booths and tables, another waved. Thankfully, Andrew guessed that they all belonged.

He took a stool at the far end of the bar near the murmuring radio and Louie, the little Mexican bartender, whisked up to him, a grin on his shrewd brown face. "Hi. Watcha know, keed?"

"Not a thing, not a thing. Bring me a big glass of water."

When it came it had a straw protruding from the shave of floating ice and a slice of lemon hanging over the side. Andrew understood—someone here who didn't belong.

"Fifty cents," said Louie. As he reached for the bill on the counter he added quietly, and without moving his lips, "Three. In the corner."

Not until his change came did he allow his eyes to roam along the facing mirror, studying each reflected face, each group, and at last to come idly to the two men and a girl at the table near the fireplace. He had never seen them before, but he would know them again. Anywhere, at any time. He sipped at the water and committed their features indelibly.

"Leaving so soon?" said Louie as Andrew got down from the stool.

"Yup. Had a hard day." That was no lie, he thought. A hard day and a much harder, much longer night before that. He gave the trio of strangers one last glance as he walked toward the wide steps that led to the lobby. They seemed all right—casually amused, heads together, interested only in themselves. But one never knew . . .

At the desk he got his key and went to his room. The bed looked like Elysium itself, but it would have to wait. First must come the report . . . the grim and bitter story of his failure.

When he had double-locked the door he walked to the center of the floor where anyone outside could see him, and yawned elaborately. Then he pulled down the shades, smoked a cigarette, turned out the lights. He entered the closet, pushed his way through the hanging confusion of suits and shirts, and groped in the blackness for the tiny stud high on the moulding. As he found it and pressed, the wall slid to the right.

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Before him was a dimly lighted cubby into which he stepped, then slid shut the closet "wall." The blank metal face slid up before his eyes, changed to wooden studding and lath, thence to concrete. Finally light cracked at his feet and grew into a long high hallway from which came the muted throttling of a gasoline engine — an auxiliary power generator purchased ostensibly for emergency winter use, but actually running year around to supply power for the lab.

Andrew walked down the hall, too weary even to bother looking into the open workrooms he passed. He stopped before the door at the far end and said his name into the grill. Faintly from within someone cried out, repeating it. Martha North. And she sounded glad, Andrew thought. Too bad.

The door opened and a smiling woman walked toward him. The smile faded as she read his haggard face. "Andy," she said, her grey eyes grave with concern. "Come in. Are you all right?"

He nodded, avoiding her gaze, and took a chair by the desk.

He felt her hand on his shoulder. "As bad as that, Andy?"

"Yeah." And he began telling her of the last three days; bitterly, not sparing himself.

* * *

I HAD that wrong feeling (he said) right from the beginning. I should have listened to it, but no — too smart, too professional, too sure of myself. So Carla is dead. And I've been seen. Printed and photographed, no doubt. I'm not going to be of much use to The Group from now on. Oh sure, I can work in the lab, I guess. Empty garbage and wash beakers and . . . I'm sorry, Martha. That's pretty childish of me, isn't it? But it's a fact that Andrew Smith is finished as an outside man. Even the police would like to have me. Yeah, that's right. Wait until I'm finished talking, Martha, and you'll understand how the law figures in.

Let's see . . . Carla didn't come back when she should have, and what did we know? We knew that she had been to Lee Chemicals in Los Angeles. Bought a microtome there. Found out that much by phoning. Then by flashing a set of phony private eye credentials, I got the desk clerk at the Ambassador to talk. He said she checked in Monday at five . . . which must have been just after she'd been to Lee Chemicals. But she hadn't checked out, and he wouldn't let me in without checking my badge with police, so I blew. A maid did admit me, though. But nothing much to be learned there. Her overnight case, the "Daily News," and two movie magazines . . . fine for a Ph. D. in botany, huh? But beyond that, nothing. I'd checked her up to the time after she'd eaten at the hotel . . . seven-thirty, Tuesday night. But nothing after. No note, no taunt from Grand-

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mother Ganley, even. No Carla. So there wasn't much I could figure to do but go through the motions she'd made on the chance that they'd be interested in anyone who made inquiries and who also visited Lee Chemicals.

And I was right, I learned later. They have their plants at all the good hotels in town, as well as in the lab supply houses. We'll have to buy what we want in Frisco from now on if we can't steal it. But here's what went. The people at Lee showed me their line of microtome cutters and I made noncomittal sounds. I don't know a damn about them, of course. Said I'd be back the next day to pick one up. Went outside, caught a cab, and just as we left the ground the driver pinked me with a sliver of glass. I was out before I could draw on him.

Sometime that night I came to in an empty room; stone walls, no windows, iron door. And not a sound except for pipes gurgling somewhere in the walls. The room was eighteen by thirty feet, and about eighteen feet high. I know, because I paced it out for the next couple of hours. They'd taken my gun, naturally, but the small knife in the heel and sole of my shoe was still there. I didn't dare take it out, though, because I might have been watched all the time. I just located it while sitting crosslegged in one corner, and let it go at that.

Like I said, about two hours after I woke, the door slid open and four guys came in for me. They were big, and they carried big guns. They asked me to come along with them. Very politely. Professionals. I went. One of them in front, and the other three spaced out behind me. We went down a long hall of poured concrete, well lighted and clean, past two other doors like the one on my cell. I'd give a lot to know how many of our people have been behind those doors, or are still there. Edgars, Mike Ganley, Manny, Ruth Clark . . .

I'll hurry it along, Martha. Got to get back upstairs. Hungry.

So I was taken out of the basement. The walls were set too high along the hallway for me to see out, but I caught country odors: Oak and Eucalyptus leaves burning, fresh air, no smog, and no surface traffic noises. They led me into a nicely furnished office. A doctor's office. I was invited to sit down, again very politely. I sat. One of the gorillas went through a door marked private and came out a minute later with a dried up little guy in a smock. He wanted my name. I told him I was Herbert Hoover. He didn't smile. Nobody did but me.

WELL, old raisin-face got out a hypo from a cabinet and filled it. "We're going to drug you, Mr. Hoover," he said. "And it is not a simple truth serum. This is something a little more drastic. Occasionally it injures the heart. I hope your heart is sound." I told him what he could do with himself . . .

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brave as hell, see, because you'd made me load up on anti-serum before leaving. And by the way, the stuff made me sick just twenty minutes out of here.

He gave me a final chance to talk, so I tried telling him I was who it said I was on the detective credentials. He shook his head. Told me they'd tried the number, checked the address. Vacant lot, of course. I didn't have anything else to say, so I went into the next room when told to and got up on the table. The four with the guns hadn't taken their eyes off me. There hadn't been a chance yet for me to try anything rough. And I didn't dare reach for the knife. I got up on the table, and Raisin Face shot the junk into my arm. It burnt like hell. "You might as well relax and take it," the doc said. I knew that, so I closed my eyes. And it did make me a little sleepy, but that anti stuff our lab cooked up last year sure worked. I got sleepy, but that's all. But I started in with my act. Someone slapped my face, hard. I rolled with it, mumbled, and lay still again. The little man told the others that I was going to be all right. Three of them were told to leave and did, and I knew it was going to be now or never. I thrashed about a little, just a little, then drew my knees up to my chest and hugged them. Doc snickered. "Foetal position, by God," he said. "Never saw it do that before." Then he slapped me again. I didn't budge. "He's under, Ok," said the remaining guard. "Can I go make a drink?" Raisin Face told him to go ahead. As soon as I heard liquid gurgling I yanked out the knife. You should have seen the little guy's face. Terrible fear. Fear that even had an odor. And before the lad at the little bar could get his gun going I had my man by his skinny neck, holding him before me with the knife pricking him above the kidneys. Real hero stuff, Martha. Just like on Teevy.

I told the doc he'd better make his gun boy behave or I'd operate. He did. The other dropped his gun to the floor and sat in the corner. And I pushed my quaking rabbit over to the gun, shoved him away, and picked it up. A new issue Army Colt. High velocity, soft nose special. Nasty.

I knew I wouldn't get anything out of the big boy in the corner. He was that kind. Dumb and tough and loyal. He'd croak before talking. But the doctor was another matter. All I had to do was aim at him and his mouth got to going. He told me that he was Dr. Arnold Haistings. That this was a sanitarium in the hills near Malibu. And that Carla had jerked the wheel of the car that had snatched her . . . just before they pinked her hand. They ended up in a stone gully beneath a cliff near Santa Monica; Carlo and two of them dead.

Bless her.

Then the doc clutched at his chest and started croaking about his heart.

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And like a damn fool I went for his act. The moment I let him at his desk, he began flopping his foot around underneath it. A bell went off somewhere . . . I just could hear it. His little rabbit face really went nasty with triumph and general meanness. So I shot him.

The window was the only way out, and after locking the door I started out. The big fellow in the corner hadn't moved yet, but he sure must have made time after I dropped. Just as I slid down into a hedge he was leaning out the window, spraying the night with slugs. I found a stone and threw it out from beneath my bush. It clanked into something and drew his fire, and it gave me a chance to put two into his hand and arm. And then I started running.

I GUESS, Martha, that I've been running for the past three days. That night I made the mistake of going down a blind canyon, somewhere up in the Santa Monica hills. They were after me with guys on horses, and I had to get into rough country to shake them. But then they sent out a few coptors with lights, and I was stopped. Someone was lucky once; got a good nick into me . . . here. No, no . . . just a graze. It's Ok. Dried over, now. I'll have it looked at soon. But first, I've got to tell you the rest. I didn't dare move all one day. Just holed up under some rocks at the end of that blind draw, watching the police coptors buzz slowly back and forth. And why so much police activity? I'm coming to that.

The coast highway would be pretty well patrolled, I knew, but I had to have food and drink. I had to chance it. From what I'd seen of that inland country I might wander around for a week without getting anywhere. The next night I found a trail and followed it . . . a few feet to one side. I came across a tethered horse, but it looked too good. Mined, for all I know. I let it go, made a wide detour around the place. It was mighty slow going; didn't make the coast highway till dawn. Got a ride in a truck heading North. Ate in Ventura, did dishes for my breakfast. I wanted to phone in, to tell what I'd learned, but . . . no money, and I couldn't risk the number here on a reverse call. Too many records kept.

I've never seen so many cops. Maybe there's always that many around, but I sure noticed them. The old gaffer at the cafe wouldn't think of loaning me the phone money, and he didn't want me around after I'd done my chores. So I lit out. I followed some old railroad tracks into a Mexican district and stole a bike there. A bike is usually a pretty good disguise, Martha. Pretty good on a residential street, maybe, but not so hot on an eight lane highway. I was stopped by a state patrolman in a coptor just a few miles south of town. He was green, though, and his chin was glass. Pure glass.

Well, I'll sum it up. I made him

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cosy behind some bushes by the highway, took his gun and pants and flew his cute little coptor all the way to Pasadena. His radio kept squawking, wanting him to answer. I was tempted to tell them I was at Redondo or some unlikely place, but they might not fall for my voice. They might even be wanting a fix on the radio. So just outside of Pasadena I set the thing down in the hills and went on walking. I knew I was plenty hot by then; too hot to risk getting near a phone, so I kept on. There's a Foothill Boulevard I never knew about. Not the big one near the hills, but one right in them. Small, but just what I wanted. I hid out till night, then started walking. What with dodging cars and dogs and neckers I didn't make very good time, so I stuck up some kid in an old '64 Ford and got as far as San Bernardino before leaving it. I know it was risky to lead this far, but there's a decent chance they wouldn't connect the kid's car with the coptor and with me. A chance that I'd take, even if it were smaller, though, because I had to let the Group know what I've learned. I won't bore you with getting from San Berdoo to here; walking mostly, getting a couple short rides.

Well . . . Carla's dead. The doctor didn't lie about that. Had every reason not to. Carla's dead. But she cost them plenty, Martha. I'll tell you why I was the center of so much fuss . . . too much fuss for merely executing an insignificant doctor. The sanitarium, he said, is run by "The Disciples." And suppose you guess who's running "The Disciples." Grandma!

Yeah.

Thea Ganley and her people.

* * *

ANDREW took a cigarette from the desk and lighted it. In the silence that followed his shocking announcement he could hear the whine of some high-frequency gadget from the lab, the murmuring of voices, and over it all the muted thrumming of the power generator. The work was going on as it had for over a hundred years, but the tempo was faster now, the pressure higher, and the dangers vastly more. He understood well what his news would mean to Martha North; as the head of security the weight of their despair would be hers, as well as the grim burden of new decisions. He watched as she passed a slim hand over her eyes, then made a white steeple of her fingers. And heavy as was his mass of grief he knew he would not exchange it for the new load of awful responsibility which she must now assume.

Martha closed her eyes and spoke. "All right, Andrew. I'll ring Mrs. Edgars. She'll see to your hurt. The doctor's not feeling well, but Lilly can probably handle it."

He rose, snubbed out the cigarette in the clean tray, glad to be through with the bitter business of

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his report. "What's the matter with Doc?"

"He experimented." A flicker of annoyance tugged at the dark wings of her brows. "Wanted to know for himself just how sick one gets on anti-serum."

Andrew was sorry he had complained earlier. But he was suddenly very proud of belonging to The Group . . . and more determined than ever that he would be at least as costly to the opposition as had Carla.

He walked stiffly to the door, opened it.

Silly, sweet, and infinitely brave little Carla.

"Andrew."

"Yes?" Over his shoulder he saw Martha's grave face soften into a smile. He marveled that she could smile.

"I think you've done very well. I'm proud of you."

LILLY Edgars, brusque and cold herself, but with the most tender old hands, went about her work with no questions. Andrew understood the woman's coldness, her silence. Somehow he even warmed to it, for he felt that momentarily he had become her husband: Marvin Edgars had not returned one evening.

His obituary had been a short note of taunt in the Los Angeles' "Mirror's" personal column. Agony column, he thought. The old name fitted better.

Disinfectant bit down to him and he winced.

At last she was through, turned away as he slipped into his muddy trousers. "Carla?"

"She was very expensive, Mrs. Edgars."

The woman nodded once, marched into her lonely bedroom and closed the door quietly.

Back in his own room he changed into the luxury of clean clothes, selected a gun, and after a few moments thought, took a small affair of plastic and wire from a locked strongbox. Then he went back down to the lounge.

The trio of strangers was still there, he saw as he took a stool at the bar. He watched them for a while in the mirror, searching their manner and the rhythm of their actions, and finding the little things he was trained to find: The small man, a Greek, perhaps, had a bulge beneath his left arm which not even the expensive tailoring of his tasteful brown pinstripe would hide. The woman, pert and blond, seemed to see everyone else in the bar but Andrew. And the other man chose to regard Andrew, rather than any of the attractive women in the place . . . and he wasn't *that* type.

Andrew tossed down the last of the drink. "Be seeing you, Louie."

"Off so soon, keed?"

He was passing the stranger's table. "Yeah. Going to see what's doin' at the village for a while." He pushed through the heavy entrance door and stepped out into the

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chilly night, conscious that the three strangers were taking it all in.

There was no one about, so he sprinted down the graveled lane to the parking lot. The two attendants there eyed his coming darkly until recognizing him.

"Yeah, Smith?"

Andrew ducked behind the attendant's shanty, out of view of the lodge. "Two men and a blond. Where'd they park?"

One indicated a fast new two-bladed Plymouth.

"Ok. Now you . . . " he jabbed a finger at the younger one, "you kill those lights. Bulbs gone, or a short. Understand? And you, as soon as you see any or all of those three coming, you take a ship out of here as if you were me. Got that?"

They nodded, hurried away.

When the field lights blinked out, Andrew raced to the Plymouth and climbed in. His hands roamed beneath the dash, learning the setup there, finding the phone. He removed a tube, yanked loose a couple of wires for good measure, then jumped out. Swinging open the engine panel, he inserted his hands and studied the motor setup. Standard G.M.C. But the small plastic case he wired into the distributor was definitely not standard. It was, in fact, an incorporation known only to the graduates of certain tough schools where the playing was for keeps. As he closed the hood on his work he heard a starter whine and the beating of a noisy takeoff. Lights climbed and swung out toward the glow of Lake Arrowhead.

They were coming.

Drawing his gun he flattened himself against the dark hulk of the craft and waited. If they hurried now he would be almost certain. It seemed too soon for a picture of himself to have been given wide circulation, but a description . . . another matter. If they hurried it would mean they wanted to take him in the village, away from those whom they might suspect of being his friends and members of The Group. And they would want to phone their knowledge or their suspicions into headquarters, wherever that was. Probably the main temple of the Disciples, he decided. He bet himself they would be quite angry at having discovered that the lodge phone was "out of order." It always was to strangers.

He heard them coming. Running.

He was almost certain. But not sufficiently so to send them to their deaths. He would have to chance an ultimate proof.

TENSELY, Andrew waited for the three to arrive, wondering how he had been traced. It seemed almost impossible for them to have known he would come here; to have known it so well that they had been waiting for him. But recalling, a moment later, the extent of their organization . . . their ability to use men so extravagantly, he decided that just as easily could they scatter their peo-

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ple all over the general area of San Bernardino, Riverside, and the mountain resorts.

Suddenly they were there, walking now because of the watchful parking attendant, but walking swiftly, purposely. He let them get within a few feet before speaking.

"No fast moves, please. Stand where you are."

They were agreeable to this.

"Did you think you could walk in here and then out? Just like that?"

The woman spoke, her thin voice petulant and puzzled. "What in the world are you talking about? Is this a holdup?"

"Maybe. Haven't I seen you before? In Los Angeles?" He hadn't, but it was part of his plan to say it. "At a meeting of the Disciples, wasn't it? Or was it at old Thea Ganley's place? Grandma's?"

The blond made an indignant snort. "This joker is nuts, Tom. Are you going to let him rave on like this?"

"Tom" was evidently content to let the raving continue. He seemed made of stone. Andrew made his next move. "I don't know about these guys, honey, don't have any business with *them*. Where'd you pick them up?"

"I . . . Pick them up?"

The small dark one willingly supplied the answer. "Look Mac, she met us down at the village. Three, four hours ago. Tom and I never saw her before. What are you? Cop?"

"Yeah. Cop." Andrews stepped out into the flood of moonlight and appeared to regard the trio speculatively. "I could be mistaken, of course, but I'll have to check. You two guys wait right here for your friend. She and I are going inside for a few minutes. There's another cop in there who can check on her. So if you two are clean, you'll wait. I've got this ship's number, you know, and you'll be making a real pot of stew for yourself if you leave while we're gone." He signalled the girl with his gun. "Let's go, lady."

For one moment he wasn't certain. Maybe they'd eyed him because of the mud on his trousers. Perhaps he'd acted so weary and so strangely that anyone would have looked hard . . . or not looked, according to the degree of his breeding. He'd know soon, though. "By the way, friend, you take the gun out with your left hand and drop it on the ground. Real slow. Then you kick it toward me. And unbutton your coat with your left hand. That's it. Got a license, of course? Carry large sums of money, I suppose?"

"That's right." The little man did as he was ordered. Cautiously, as if afraid the gun would burn him, he eased it awkwardly from its holster and let it drop to the hard-packed mountain dirt. His foot nudged it across to Andrew who pocketed it, fully as cautiously, groping for it with his eyes on the three.

"Thanks. Now let's be going. You wait right here, boys. We'll be back

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in ten minutes. It's the girl we're curious about, not you two." It was not too good a story, but he thought it might do, considering what he'd given them. If they were on the other side, they would risk anything now to get going with their knowledge that this was the headquarters of The Group. But if they were not, they would stick tight, steering clear of the stupid trouble a hick mountain constable could make. He thought of one other test.

"Let's have your ignition key, Jack. Just in case."

The big lad slowly dug out a leather key container and tossed it. Deftly, and with his left hand, Andrew caught it and motioned again to the blond. "Let's go." Only a sharp professional would have extra ignition keys handy.

He couldn't help but admire her as she carried on with her act. "You two guys are witness to this, see? You're going to help me make plenty of trouble for this jerk cop."

Andrew smiled patiently and indicated the path back to the lodge. "Let's go." They went, he with a ready eye for the big boy to draw, and also on the lookout that the woman before him didn't dip suddenly into her purse or coat pocket.

When they rounded the bend and put pine trees between themselves and the parking lot, Andrew took her purse and extracted a small automatic of Belgian make. Silently he handed her back the purse. Why speak? They both knew the score.

They were almost to the lodge when it came—the sound of the Plymouth whirring into life and jumping into the air. Andrew nodded to himself and marched the girl in through a side door. He stopped then in the hall, stole a look at the sweep-second hand on his watch, and waited about forty seconds.

When the flat, echoing crack of the exploding coptor reached them he flinched involuntarily.

The petite blond jerked around, her mouth a dark little O of understanding. She began to cry.

Andrew put away his gun, put an arm around her. A filthy business, he thought. Was even near-immortality worth it?

* * *

THE tube ride from Riverside Air Base to downtown Los Angeles lasted twenty minutes, hardly long enough for the middle-aged Captain to read his paper. He surrendered his battered bags to a porter and rode with him up the wide private escalator that led to the Biltmore Hotel. A bellboy snatched the bags from the porter and trotted to the desk.

"I'm Leslie North," he said when the clerk deigned to look up. "I've a reservation."

"Yes, Captain. Just a moment." The clerk consulted his books rapidly. "Of course, sir. Would you sign, please?" He pushed the leather-backed pad to Les who put down his name.

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"You aren't using your rank, sir? You're out?"

"Just this morning."

"Congratulations, sir."

"What?"

"I said congratulations."

The waiting bellboy took the key, scooped up the bags again, and headed to the elevator.

"Thanks." Les said the word flatly to the clerk and left to ride the four flights up to his room.

It was a good room, but it was, nevertheless, just another hotel room. Like rooms in London, Madrid, Cairo, New York, and all the other leave towns on his tour of duty. He tipped the boy, locked the door behind him, and went to the window. The bright streets below were choked with inching cars and the offices were disgorging their people. Across the way the loafers and orators of Pershing square milled about in seeming imitation of the rushing office workers. They would settle back into their routine in a while, Les supposed. When the streets quieted they would again stand about frantically doing nothing, saying nothing that mattered. He hoped he'd never be down there, one of them, with comfortable people in comfortable rooms looking down at himself.

There was a good chance of that happening, however.

Les North tossed his cap to the bed and hung his blue Air Corps blouse in the closet. Idly he pulled open the dresser drawer, inspected their emptiness. It was something he'd often done lately. He didn't know quite why. Might find something.

It was something to do, though.

That was it, he decided. Something to do. He was utterly bored. There was nothing he wanted to do. Not eat, sleep, drink, talk, make love, nothing.

No—one thing he should do: Buy civilian clothes. He and the Air Corps were utterly through with each other. The sooner he climbed out of their uniform the happier they would both be.

Going to the window again, he gazed down, trying to remember where the nearest mens' clothier would be. But there'd hardly be time left for that today. Tomorrow was soon enough. He had plenty of time. Too much.

Les sat on the bed and stared at the bathroom door. So until then he could hash things over for the thousandth time. He could relive his arrest in San Francisco four months ago, and his stunned amazement at the incredible charges that had been lodged against him. He could recall the various young faces of the enlisted M.P.s, all of them different in feature, each alike with guardhouse disgust or hatred.

And the court martial . . . the long tedious affair of charge, evidence, and—after a fashion—defense.

LES decided he might like a drink after all. He got out a fifth of White Horse from his bag, filled a

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tumbler half full and topped it with ice-water from the beaded faucet above the sink. That would be something to think about for a long, long time . . . the two majors who thought they had seen him sneak out from a restricted high-tension lab. The grim civilian armament salesman who testified he had been approached by North, who said North attempted to dicker for the sale of plans of highly secret ray cannon.

And the verdict itself: "Not guilty, by reason of insufficient evidence." But with a stinger riding along that "recommended" North be discharged for the good of the service. Not a dishonorable discharge, but not an honorable one. A "Blue", it was called. And so it was. It reposed right now in the bottom of his smaller bag; a sickly azure parchment with old-fashioned lettering which proclaimed that Captain Leslie Richardson North, U.S.A.C. was legally out of the service. His name typed, several anonymous initials affixed, and a scrawled, illegible signature of some clerk lieutenant.

Something to show his kids when they said, "Daddy, what did you do in the phony war of Nineteen-seventy-something?"

"Me? Why I went around the world as a commissioned civilian expert. I oversaw the installation of rays on our fighters. And then I was framed out of the service."

Any questions? Hmmm, kids?

Les drained the glass and set it carefully on the floor.

"And why were you framed, Daddy?"

He came from the imaginary dialogue with the non-existant (thank God!) children and said aloud: "I'll be damned if I know."

Getting up, he prowled about the room, then stopped at the table of reading matter provided by the management: A technical digest devoted to cafeteria management, Vu, the Post, Colliers, of two weeks back, Ridleys, Life, two girlie magazines, and a Gideon bible. At random he opened the bible. "If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder unto the words . . . "

Deuteronomy 13.

Deuteronomy. Sounded like a science, he thought. The science of Deutering.

Les put the Gideon back, looked briefly at the girlie mag.

"Hullo," he said the photochrome of a hefty nude reclining in shallow white and blue surf.

It was exactly six-thirty.

SEVEN thirty-eight found him wandering beneath the ancient palms of the Santa Monica palisades, bathed and shaved and melancholy. He sank onto a bench near the edge of the cliff and sat overlooking the yacht harbor, seeming to watch the evening breakers smash themselves against the jetty, half-hearing the cries of gulls and the whishing roar of nearby surface traffic. Once a

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heavy thundering overhead pulled him from his dim and troubled reverie—the Hawaii rocket, arching up through the stratosphere, seconds away from its sooty concrete cradle in the San Fernando Valley. A lousy way to travel, Les thought, remembering the uncomfortable physical sensations of pressure and weightlessness and sub-audible keening attendant to such transportation.

The sound trailed up through the red-grey overcast and was gone.

Behind him a voice remarked, "You'd rather bicycle, I take it." It was an even baritone, the enunciation cultured and rather clipped. Les looked around. A tall figure stood silhouetted against the neon glow of Santa Monica, a man in a religious habit, his face half hidden beneath his black cowl.

"Forgive me," he continued, "but I couldn't help noticing your attitude of utter disapproval when the rocket went over. That, set against the fact that you are in Air Corps dress, made for paradox. Have you a match?"

Smiling mechanically, Les dug out his lighter and handed it to the man. "We don't all fly."

"I have a theory," said the other as he puffed his cigarette alight. The tiny flame glowed briefly on a strong sensitive face . . . an amiable satyr done by Rosetti, Les decided.

"My theory is that the invention of the lever and the wheel was the greatest catastrophe to befall mankind since the discovery of sex."

"You're anti-science?"

The man laughed, came around the bench and sat. "Good Lord, no. But I'm pro-enjoyment. Pro-leisure, pro-quiet, and completely against such frustrations as that rocket.

Les lighted another cigarette, his fifth in forty minutes. "I don't quite follow you, I'm afraid. How are rockets a frustration?" Somehow he didn't resent this fellow's intrusion, though he did have to stretch himself to respond. He hoped it wasn't all a buildup to some mawkish "holy-joe" proselyting.

"Rocket!" The cowled man made scorn of the word. "Those people up there, they'll be checked into the Royal Hawaiian within minutes. Tomorrow, Saturday, they'll rest up from their ordeal of de-accelleration. Sunday, they'll loll on the expensive beaches, sweating out the previous night's alcohol, and that afternoon they'll begin steeling themselves, each in his various way, against the shot back to here. You call that an enjoyable weekend?" The stranger tossed back his cowl with a practiced shake, revealing a nobly built head, a contradiction in that such a skull should have been surmounted by a mane. Instead, the man wore his black and grey hair crew-cut.

Les made himself more comfortable, adjusting unconsciously to the other's ease and loquacity. "There may be business men aboard, you know. And brass. Think of the saving in time over the old slow jets that take several hours to Hawaii."

"And what do they do with their

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saved time?"

That was unanswerable, of course. Les conceded that the world was moving too fast. But he wanted to know something else. "Why did you say that the discovery of sex was a catastrophe?"

"I spoke too hurriedly; fault of mine. My tongue is the beast, and I the impatient rider. It is not copulation, either as a duty nor even as a hobby that is disastrous. It is naming it and worrying about that name and weaving absurd Mother Hubbards of theory about the matter. As Korzybski said, 'The Map is not the Territory,' and we have become a world of map-makers."

Les frowned mentally. It was strange and perplexing talk from a man of the cloth. "Sorry, but . . . uh, of what order are you? Not Catholic, I take it?"

"No. They would index you for saying that. Although we owe much to their Society of Jesuits. I am a Thane, a priest, one might term me, of the Disciples."

A bit ill at ease, Les nodded. He had heard a little about this new—religion. It had sprung up about three years ago, just as the cold war with India threatened to thaw and ignite. It had sprung up, grown with monstrous rapidity, and for the public flowered into rumor and fancy and half-truth. Only a little did he know for certain: The Disciples were loathed by members of the orthodox varieties of religion; they traced their origin to a Revelation — to tablets from the recently discovered ruins of Lemuria. They were at once a gay and social order, a retreat for practicing mystics, and a growing power in the government of Western U.S.A. He envied the man his . . . belonging, his ease of security, even the anonymity of his simple and comfortable habit. He said, "I'm afraid I'm not much up on your church. I've been away for almost three years. Haven't read much but technical digests and 'Stars & Stripes'."

"That's Ok. No one need know of us to speak to us. We don't recruit, nor do we stand on silly ceremonies nor medieval courtesies. But you'd be amazed how firmly ingrained is the respect accorded to our gabardine. Or is it fear? I sometimes wonder. I can even get a seat on the Inyo to L.A. tube."

They laughed at that. The professional jesters of Teevy had made the crowded ride from Los Angeles to the Inyo-Kern rocket base a reflex-trigger to humor. The route was now synomous in the English-speaking world with snafu and sardine-like confusion.

"Tell you what, Captain. It's getting a little chilly out here, and I've got a mild thirst on. Would you care to join me at a fine and rather private bar I know of? The drinks are free there for us . . . for you. It's just across the street and down half a block. I feel extremely disquisitious, and you have the stamp of the aimless and the mark of the listener. What about it?"

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Leslie North hesitated. He knew that the Thane referred to one of the Disciples own lounges . . . they had many, he'd heard, but he didn't relish the picture of himself lifting the cup in the society of garbed clerics, in surroundings which might be studded with God-knew-what religious symbology and effigy. But the paradox, as he considered it, was tempting.

"Of course, if I've been too forward . . . I didn't mean to thrust myself upon you . . . " The stranger pushed his hood back on. "I'm very sorry."

North stood. "Do you have any good Scotch?"

They did.

THEY had a dipsomaniac's heaven of bottles, brews from every corner of the world, and they had easy music and decent oaken furnishings, and gentle leather couches. And they also had a clientele which would have been welcome at any exclusive club in the Americas; women with the aura of refinement and riches, gowned and bejewled and gracious and beautiful. And men in religious habit, tuxedo, and business drape, who conducted themselves in a manner befitting their obvious positions of wealth and power and taste. Les was the only one in uniform.

He was quite impressed. He said so to the Thane, whose name, he learned, was Hunt. Brenner Hunt.

And for the first time in four months he relaxed, forgetting the pain of his inglorious dismissal from the Air Corps, forgetting even to hate those unknown ones who had woven a net of lies and deception into his frameup.

HOURS later, many drinks later, the Thane bid North goodnight and crossed town in a cab. Near the highland community of Sunland the coptor swung down to a huge estate that dominated the top of a sharp peak. For a moment it hovered, then when lights sprang on below defining a grassy parking area, it dipped to a landing. Brenner Hunt stepped out, dismissed the machine, then hurried through the dewy grass beneath a lane of eucalyptus. He tapped the proper signal into a door button, entered, and went brisky down the dim hall, his heels echoing sharply against the tiled mosaic floor. Three times on his route deeper and deeper within fastness of the building he was scrutinized by respectful but sharp-eyed guards who waved him on upon recognizing him. Brenner Hunt was well known here within the home temple of the Disciples.

When he arrived at Mrs. Ganley's suite, he was thankful to find the old lady awake. "I think I've done it," he said when they had been seated in the luxurious library.

Thea Ganley's obsidian eyes glinted as she swung her seamed face up from the coffee service. "How?"

The Thane allowed himself a dramatic moment of triumph. He smiled

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thinly, eyeing the obese crone opposite him. "I offered him security."

"And his sister?" Mrs. Ganley tugged impatiently at her cerise tent of a robe.

"I didn't think it wise to get into that subject. There's time enough."

The other's eyes flickered down to her veined hands. "For you, perhaps. What is he like?"

Brenner Hunt shrugged. "Bitter, naturally. Intelligent. I heard the story of his discharge. It was interesting to get it from his side. We did a good job on the frame — he suspects some sort of intra-service squabble, if anyone." The Thane sipped at his coffee in the classical wooden manner of all ecclesiastics. "Very bitter and discouraged and without any prospects of work. I first made him curious about the Disciples, told him what I was earning, and that I was not obliged to take any sort of vows whatsoever. Then we left it for a while, talked over the Indian situation and decided there would never be war with them. He came back around to the subject finally. Wanted to know . . . very tactfully . . . what my duties were."

"Murder, blackmail, and theft," murmured Thea Ganley.

"When he learned that I, too, was an electrophysist, he insisted we have a drink on that. Then we talked shop a bit . . . the man has some fascinating ideas about practical application of the Lohring-Maher Field Theory . . . and finally circled back to the Disciples. I told him our setup —that we exist to bring joy and knowledge to all et cetera. I even hinted at some of the lab work we're doing on Hindu phenomena—almost believed it myself."

The old woman cut the air in an angry gesture. "I'm tired, Brenner. Get to the point."

"Certainly, Mrs. Ganley. North agreed to let me bring him here tomorrow. And after the show I'll put on for him . . . we'll have a new Thane with us."

"So!" For a few moments the old woman drummed thoughtfully on the surface of the mahogany coffee table. "And you're certain you learned absolutely nothing about his sister?"

"Not yet. Soon, though."

Thea Ganley laboriously pushed herself erect. "I'm very tired. That'll be all now. We'll talk more of this tomorrow."

"Of course." The Thane appeared a bit piqued. "Shall I call your maid to help you to bed?"

"No. Just get out."

"Goodnight."

BRENNER Hunt went to his room and got into bed. He had just pulled the covers about himself when the door opened and two guards got him up. Naked and protesting obscenely, he was dragged to a lab. The drugs he was given there made him more than willing to talk. Proudly he admitted to the doctor and to Thea Ganley what he had learned. It wasn't much . . . just a scrap of

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information, but he'd intended that such a valuable item should receive a commensurate award. A promotion, surely, to Red Thane; perhaps even his name enrolled in the ranks of those who were to receive Agelessness . . . when that time came.

Instead, he drooled idiotically and babbled: " . . . his sister Martha North all during his service time he heard from her and all of her letters were from a San Bernardino post office box but he didn't know what she had been doing but San Bernardino was where they were from and I know and I not the Disciples and I know where his letters came from but since his frame he hasn't written to her and he doesn't want to so we'll have to change that and . . . "

"Shut him up." Thea Ganley spoke calmly enough, but deeply within her ugly hulk of a body she was hurt. She had always admired the clever Thane, liked him even. And she had planned that as soon as It happened and she'd made herself twenty-five again . . .

But was no one to be trusted, save for another Ganley?

Must all others betray her? She pressed a bell summoning the guards into the room.

The doctor nodded to his great aunt and brought the Thane around. For a moment, Brenner Hunt looked wildly about, then remembered. Smiling sardonically, he waited for the gloating and the anger and the sentencing to come. He fancied that for a man who had just thrown away a chance at several thousand years of life he was behaving quite philosophically.

"You are not going to die yet, Thane Hunt," said the old woman. "But your life will depend upon two things. First, you will see to it that Leslie North becomes a Disciple. Then you will locate his sister. You will accomplish all this in two weeks." Her eyes captured his, held them in a steady fierce gaze. "And also you will be hypno-conditioned against any further treachery. It's what you've earned. Perhaps later it can be removed. Goodnight again, Thane."

Brenner Hunt watched her waddle from the bright room. A muscle in his arm began jumping uncontrollably.

GINNY Harris woke from troubled dreams into the even more troubling reality of an unfamiliar room with a locked door and no windows. She wondered what time it was . . . what day, even. Dark smudges beneath her famous green eyes told of her rebellious hunger-strike, hinted at the fear she kept hidden beneath her feline fury and disgust. A tray of food on a swinging shelf caught her glance. She wondered if she'd be able to resist. Better spill it all now before I find out, she decided. She climbed shakily from the modest bed and was on her way to the food when the door opened. Two men in white

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smocks entered, the same two who had unsuccessfully coaxed and argued with her last "night" . . . or whenever it was.

"Whatever you're peddling you can go to hell," she shouted. She spun around, intending to grab the meal tray and pitch it in their faces.

One of them held her from behind. "You're not acting logically. Don't you see we can do with you as we please? Now the less you resist the better off you're going to feel."

His companion confronted her. "If we turn you loose will you cooperate?"

"Sure," Ginny told them. They let go and she managed to dump coffee on one of them before she was stiff-marched from the room.

FATHER Marek smiled politely. "What was that?"

The man in the darkness said, "I asked you where you have been."

"Oh." The priest settled back against the comfortable leather sofa. "I was called out of town. To Victorville. An old miner was hurt. A friend of mine. I heard his confession. It took me two days to go and to return."

"Very good, Father." The man in the darkness whispered to someone. "I don't like his eyes—glassy. Like he's been on a bender. Think they'll pass?"

Someone whispered back that no one would be suspecting anything. Why shouldn't they pass?

"And now, Father, tell us one more time what you think of the Disciples."

"Wonderful, wonderful." The cleric beamed at the blackness on the other side of the room. "They represent the nearest approach yet to the perfect religion. They are service, joy, and humility in one."

"And how have you come to learn this?"

"Through talking with members of my flock who became Disciples. Through months and months of debate, with myself."

The men in the darkness whispered that he would do. One more question they put to him. "And what are you going to do next Sunday?"

"Pardon?"

"Next Sunday at your services . . . what will you . . ."

The Priest interrupted, eager to please. "I shall renounce Catholicism and urge each member of my flock to become a Disciple."

"All right, Father. Go to sleep."

Obediently he leaned back and dozed.

"Fly him to town, outskirts of Pasadena will do, and turn him loose." Someone snickered, said, "What I wouldn't give to watch the L.A. Bishop when he hears about this."

GENERAL Homer Peters brushed passed the M.P.s at the gate and flagged down a tram. He swung off at the base headquarters and marched inside. A colonel glanced up, astonished.

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"Where the hell did you vanish to, sir? We turned the town inside out looking for you." He took the General's kit and opened the inner door for him. "God, but you had us worried. "What happened?"

At his desk, the General halted, then wheeled to confront the startled subordinate. "You didn't drag Intelligence into this, did you?"

"No, but I sure was going to. If you hadn't came back by twenty-three hundred I was going to. What happened to your face?"

"Got in a fight. Out in back of that bar. There was a woman involved, and I didn't want to . . . uh . . . " He stopped, shook his head. Then, almost as if reciting he added, "You be a good fellow, Jensen, and make up something for the staff. Fact of the matter is I got looped and spent the night and the next day with . . . with Priscilla."

The colonel's jaw dropped, then he snapped shut his mouth and whistled softly. "I'll be damned. You old dog, you. I'll be god damned. Who's Priscilla?"

"Never mind. Now go on out. I've got work to do."

With a sloppy salute, born of long association with the General, the junior officer retired from the office. When he was gone the General rummaged in his desk, got out an order E-744 . . . regarded it for a moment, then discarded it in favor of stationery bearing only his name. He took a pen and began to write: "Senator Harry T. Hawes, Becking Hill Drive, Washington, D.C. Dear Ted: Long time no write, but neither do you. Here's what I want you to do . . . and for God's sake do it quick. Get as much support as you can and bloc thru a resolution allowing ALL and ANY religious groups the privilege of establishing and maintaining chapels, temples, or whatever, on all military installations. These chapels are to be staffed in the regular manner by commissioned members of the respective clergy. I know this is something you can do, as you have the entire Northern State bloc in your hand . . . and I feel this is something you ought to do, considering what we both know of the role you played in the Tidal Hills business. I realize I am pushing you, hard and in a mean way, but it's something you must do. And it is in the interest of National security, if you like. Your old friend and schoolmate, Homer Peters."

He read over what he had written, then satisfied, went from his office into the code room. There he dismissed the nomcom in charge and after scrambling the note, sent it himself to Becking Hill. That done, he went to the latrine and was very sick. There was unsatisfactory . . . something . . . in his thoughts. Something grey and angry and confusing. He washed his face in icy water.

OLD David Ganley sat on the lodge porch in the fine spring sunlight and dreamed as the clouds chased across the bright mountain

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sky. Half-awake, he dreamed he was again twenty, back in eighteen-sixty six, and was meeting the woman who was to become his first wife. But her face was hard to recall. He could bring back her hair, her manner (soft and languid and curved and smiling) but her face blended with all the other women he'd loved since that time. All eight of them. Seven of them? No, eight; he'd almost forgotten Alice.

He hummed to himself . . . "Have you forgotten sweet Alice Ben Bolt? She da, da, da dum . . . something." He had forgotten. The tune wasn't right, neither was the memory of Alice's face.

A cloud crossed the sun and David Ganley sighed.

A band of vacationers passed beneath the lodge porch. One of them, a pert little girl of eighteen or twenty, looked up at the bronzed and handsome man who reclined in the late April sunset and grinned. A pixie grin of challenge and springtime and the-world-is-mine. Ganley looked abruptly away; something twisted within his heart and guts, and the evening . . . the long, long evening began.

He got up and went inside the lodge, for the wind was rising and it had turned cold for him. It would have been so simple to make her acquaintance and charm her, he knew. A man learned a lot in a hundred and thirty-some years . . . even about women.

He entered his room.

Sure. He could have met her. Could have won her in an astonishingly short time. And then? David Ganley looked at the framed picture of himself on the dresser. Then he would again begin another long trip to the moment when the difference between his youthfulness and her normal aging would cause superstitious talk and sniggling and heartbreak . . . and he'd be forced to write the good-by note and run.

The mirror showed him a different face than the one in the picture. That man had long grey hair, and wore a moustache, but his reflection showed him to be clean-shaven now, with black hair, cropped. Yes, it was even necessary to take occasional leave of "oneself" and to create a new facade for one's aging acquaintances and fading shopkeepers to accept as "cousin" or "nephew."

He sighed. That had been Mrs. Edgar's mother's idea, back in 1924 or 25. Almost yesterday, it seemed. And now her daughter was old and tired and widowed.

He ran his eyes about the room that had for decades been his, noting little in his reverie, not seeing the litter of mementos he had brought with him from various lives: An early issue Colt he had won at cards while homesteading in the west. A bowler he had once thought quite ritzy. Beside it a paper hat, torn and fading, with a banner about the rim that read "Kiss me again, I'm still conscious." A woman's elbow-length glove of brocaded velvet. A yellowed

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edition of the San Bernardino 'Sun,' with scare headlines proclaiming a disaster of a ship named 'Titanic.' An autographed photo of Clara Bow.

And more. Much more.

Precious trash.

Switching on the lights, David Ganley went to the bookcase and eyed the titles. This would be a good evening to begin studying chemistry —Martha would be so pleased. He pulled down a recent volume of high-school level work, thumbed through it speculatively. But the simple equations discouraged him — all those numbers and letters and symbols. He would have to master algebra first, he supposed . . . and, so far, that subject had defied him. He put back the book.

"Old dog and new tricks," he mused.

Someone to talk to . . . That was what he wanted. Going to the closet, he slipped between the hanging clothes and into the waiting elevator.

Martha North met him as he emerged fifty feet below.

"Good evening, David. I'm going into the lab for a conference. How about coming along?" She waited, her friendly smile warming him.

"Uh, no. I don't guess so, Martha." Embarassed, he searched around for an excuse, decided to tell the truth. "All that there technical talk, well, it doesn't make much sense to me. I'm just wandering around."

"All right. I'll let you know what's said." She turned to go, paused, looked back. "Why don't you drop in on me in a couple of hours. We'll have tea together."

"That would be fine, thanks. I will."

"And David, why not drop down and talk to the girl we took the other night. She's not used to being alone, poor thing. Would you do that?"

He nodded, turned and walked in the direction of the "cell block."

SO there's been another captured, he mused. He shook his head, entered the long low corridor. A no good business, all this, with people killing and tunneling around underground and drugging each other. And all over himself, David Ganley.

It was still hard to realize that fact . . . that he was the focus of so much attention, so much hurting. If only, began the old old thought, if only I hadn't fished that Cheyenne out of the river . . .

. . . a bend of the Arkansas River. He'd become separated from the others of the party, cut off when the buffalo herd divided and flew across the plains. One group had gone North toward Pawnee Fork, another Southeast. Ganley had ridden after the first part of the herd, his duty being to locate them and report back later to the main body of the hunters.

That evening, after ascertaining that the herd was still for the night, and seeing they would go no farther because of the swollen river, he had packed the long green plains grass

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into a comfortable mattress and had bedded down beneath a tree. Sleep came quickly as he listened to his foolish love-lorn horse whinny at the fragrant scents that drifted up from the nearby herd. He didn't worry much about Indians, for this was 1874, quite a while before the fierce plains warfare broke out.

A splash and a cry awakened him, and gun in hand, he stood near the crumbling lip of the riverbank, staring at the dark head that bobbed in the swift moonlit current. And seized by some heroic impulse which he had never felt before, he hurled himself into the water and managed to drag out the Indian . . . a scout like himself who had made the mistake of sleeping too close to the eroding bank . . .

. . . . Ganley turned at another bend in the corridor, his mind skipping over the intervening years . . .

. . . years later, 1878 or '79, he was again in this territory, a member of sheriff Masterson's posse, riding hard and happy after a feeble band of rebel Reds. In a stupid engagement, supporting Murray's infantry, he'd been wounded, left to die, and had awakened to find a bloody Cheyenne regarding him expressionlessly. By sign the Indian told him he was the same one Ganley had fished from the river, years before, and he indicated the canteen. "It will heal and preserve you," was the gist of the warrior's gesturing, and he had died . . .

The bitter liquid had indeed healed Ganley.

And it had certainly preserved him.

A swig a year had kept him an apparent thirty-two since that moment.

He halted before the thick plastic window that fronted the lighted cell. Within, apparently asleep on the modest but comfortable bed, he saw the girl whom Andrew Smith had brought in. As he was debating whether or not to disturb her, a quiet voice sounded behind him. "Her name is Becky, David."

A slender brown-haired man in soiled workclothes advanced from the shadows. "I'm Simon Letona," said the stranger.

A new laborer, David thought. "Hello." He nodded his introduction at the other. "Becky, huh?"

"Yes. She was frightened and lonely, so I came to be with her. She asked for me . . . and I happened to be passing nearby."

"I see." David Ganley studied the other's friendly face, noted especially the deepset intelligent brown eyes. He had a strange feeling that he knew this man, but know him or not, it had been long since he'd been made so . . . cheerful and somehow secure by another. "What do you suppose will happen to her," he asked.

Simon Letona looked past him into the cell. He smiled again. "Becky is going to be all right. She'll be free and happy soon." He looked back at Ganley. "And so will you."

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WHEN the dash speaker spoke of the ugly weather that had descended upon the mountains, Brenner Hunt put the coptor down on the grounds of the San Bernardino temple and he and Les North, for the first time in his new cassock, continued on their way in a luxurious Disciple-owned convertible. Accustomed as he was—after his years as a Captain—to the courtesy extended Brass, he could not help but be impressed by the rich and smooth efficiency of the Disciples. They must be immensely wealthy.

The car swept up into the foothills and he spoke to the Thane about this.

"Wealthy enough," said Brenner Hunt, "but not so much as one might imagine. You see, we do not believe that money should be idle. Therefore almost every dollar that comes to us is quickly converted into things to use; temples, coptors, cars, recreational equipment, labs, libraries. Even to economic aid to members. Money is to be spent. Idle money is evil . . . although I dislike the metaphysical connotations of the word 'evil'."

Les tried to conceal his smile, but the man beside him noticed. So he said, "I'm still having difficulty accustoming myself to being a working member of a religion which balks at talking metaphysics."

"Hasn't the average person always backed off from that word? One of the reasons for the rapid growth of the Disciples is that we have thrown over a good number of the 'blah' words." The Thane broke off, concentrating on passing a lumbering truck. "Metaphysics," he went on when they were around, "meta ta physika—those things relating to external nature. It was once a decent word, but thanks to Kant, it slid off into the realm of poor Conan Doyle's fairy photographs. So instead, we give our followers what they want—be it bread or cultural expressions or proofs of the greater realities."

"That last," said North. "I don't quite follow."

"The larger picture of ourselves and the universe. That formerly termed the supernatural. After all, my dear fellow, we *are* a religion. It's just that instead of braying nonsense about Heaven and Hell and . . . uh . . . Immortality, we are directing our energies to enlarging those talents and senses man now posesses." He stole a side glance at the frowning North. "Were not your few hours in the temple the other day far more convincing than a year spent listening to the right Reverend Fiddle, D.D.?"

North had to agree. He thought back over the demonstrations that had been presented before an evening meeting of new Disciple members: Incontrovertible proof of the existence of the human aura, and a brief lecture showing how an aura-screen could be used to diagnose physical ills; half a dozen tricks to make for individual physical efficien-

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cy, cribbed no doubt from Hatha Yoga, but neatened and made more acceptable to Western thinking; and the ultimate clincher—the period at the conclusion of the meeting, termed by the presiding Red Thane, the "communion," during which the audience was ordered to reach down into that unused portion of their minds and then reach out mentally to each other. Feeling a bit silly, but determined to play the game, North tried, and was amazed and a bit frightened at the ensuing experience: He had become aware of a vast silent murmuring—there seemed no other way to put it—and his entire nervous system had undergone a sort of tingling.

Could be.

As Brenner said, it was more convincing than oratory.

The car shot past the mile-high turnoff to Crestline and continued up the wide express highway toward Arrowhead. North was on his first assignment—to direct the installation of power equipment at a campground just purchased by the Disciples. It was a rather primer task for an electro-phycisist, one not too suited to his abilities, but the Council had apologetically explained that his duties would be purely executive, and that he would at least have a chance to observe their methods of conducting a huge open meeting.

The grounds were some distance from the Lake, so when the car swung into the Village, Hunt suggested they stop for a bite before continuing on. North agreed.

THEY parked, ran up the top as the sky had become dark and threatening, and climbed out. North felt rather self-conscious in his somber robes, walking amongst the brightly-dressed vacationers, but still more perturbing was the frequent nod of respect and greeting he received. Nothing in the Air Corps had prepared him for such consideration, for there the salute was prescribed, and the courtesy mechanical.

He held open the door of a cafe for Hunt, then froze in astonishment as the man passed in. Not five feet away, her face expressing equal surprise, stood his sister, Martha.

He grinned, opened his mouth to speak, but halted when Martha put a finger to her lips and shook her head. Then she indicated the cafe with a nod and deftly pantomimed holding a phone. She turned and was gone.

Slowly, North followed after Hunt. Evidently the encounter had escaped the Thane, for he was already taking his place at a table. "It's a bar and grill," he said when Les joined him. "Martinis while we wait."

Martha . . . her strange silence and actions.

What the devil could it mean?

In a lounge around the corner, Martha was in a booth dialing the lodge. She kept her eyes on the entrance as she waited for her number. Andrew Smith answered.

"Andy—Martha. I'm in 'Chico's'

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in the Village. I just saw Les, my brother. He's wearing the garb of a Disciple priest. You know what that means!"

There was a short silence while Andrew thought quickly. "They're after us, through him."

"There were two of them. They're around the corner in a cafe. I signaled Les not to speak to me, nor about me. I don't think he will, Andy . . . and I'm going to call him from here. But just in case he's been . . . changed, I may be needing your help. Get here in a hurry, and bring my black raincoat over your arm. And some glasses and a gun. I'll change here and go out the back with you. Any suggestions?"

"Nope." He hung up.

Martha looked up the number of the cafe, dialed it.

"Hello," she said to the proprietor. "Me and my girl friend, we want to speak to one of them preachers that just went into your place."

"Huh? Well, uh . . . " The man snickered. "Which one do you want?"

"Oh, I dunno. Just a sec." Martha partially muffled the mouthpiece and pretended a short dialogue. "Hello?" I guess I'll take the tanned one. The one with the brown hair and big shoulders. Please put him on, honey. Hmmmm?"

The manager put down the phone and walked over to the Thane's table, snickering to himself and reflecting on matters lewd. "There's a lady on the phone wants to talk to you."

Brenner looked up from his drink. "Me?"

"Well, no. She said she wanted to talk to the one with the broad shoulders." He grinned knowingly.

"Goodness, North. Your first convert. You're obligated to talk to her, of course."

"Why? You talk to her."

"She doesn't like my type, obviously. Anyway, it's our policy. We speak to anyone. No snoot. Who knows . . . maybe she's rich."

Leslie North pulled a wry face and slid from behind the table. "Where's the phone?"

"You can take it in the booth, if you'd rather. I'll switch it on."

LES strode toward the booth at the far end of the busy cafe, a little angry at his sister for her outlandish prankishness, yet puzzled that such a calm and undramatic one as she would for any reason resort to such melodrama. He picked up the receiver, eyed the proprietor till that man replaced the other phone.

"Hello?"

"Is there anyone with you that can listen . . . anyone on an extension?"

"No. I'm in a booth. Martha, what the hell is the idea? Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"That's one way of putting it, Les. But so are you. Look, we don't dare take much time with this, so here's the setup to tell your friend: There's two of us, trying to pick you both up. You excused yourself

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because you have other things to do. Got that?"

"Yes, but . . . "

"Les, have I ever played phony with you? For God's sake, believe me."

"All right, dear. Go ahead."

"I want to get in touch with you later. How long are you going to be in Arrowhead?"

"Just overnight. We'll be going back down in the morning."

"And you're really a member of that cult?"

"You can call it that. Yes, I am."

"We'll go into it later. Look, Leslie, this is utterly life and death, and I'm not exaggerating in the slightest. If you don't believe me, just tell your friend that you've been talking to your sister, and that she can be found in the bar around the corner from 'Chico's." My life wouldn't be worth a dime from that moment. There's a big, big game going on, and I've got to let you know the score. When can I see you alone in Los Angeles?"

Les stole a glance at Brenner. The Thane raised his glass in a sardonic toast. He looked at the proprietor, saw that man reading a paper. "Tomorrow evening, I guess. Where?"

"One of the piano rooms at the public library. They're soundproof. Seven. All right?"

"Sure, kid, but . . . Are you positive all this . . . this undercover business is necessary?"

"I swear to you it is, Les. Hang up now, darling, and go back to your friend. Put on a big foolish grin."

"That'll be no act."

"Tomorrow evening, then, and make sure you're alone. Goodby."

Martha hung up, then made her way slowly from the phone to a table. Had she done right, she wondered. Had she? But what else could be done?

She ordered a beer, lit a cigarette, and with an eye on the clock, settled back to wait for Andy Smith's arrival.

It took him eleven minutes to cover the five miles from the lodge . . . not bad time, considering he had taken time to bring along three others; two guards—men, and a lab technician named Sal. They took the booth just ahead of hers, and no one made her any sign of recognition.

By the time she had finished her cigarette, Andy had made his play. He and one of the guards went to the corridor that led to the rest rooms. Martha followed in a moment.

"Couldn't find your black raincoat," Smith said, "but this'll do." He produced a package from his pocket, opened it and removed a glistening vinylite slicker. "And here's some glasses. Horn rims. Make you look like a social worker. Yeah . . . that's fine. Now let's get going." He helped Martha adjust the collar of her coat, gave her a small automatic, then spoke to the man who waited. "You leave now, out the front,

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and take a cab. When Martha and I are in the air, follow us just long enough to see that we aren't tailed. Then come back and pick up the others. And if we are being followed, well . . . you know what to do to them."

The guard nodded, went back to the lounge without speaking, and the two made their way out into the drizzle of the dirty alley.

A MINUTE later, Andy, his hands fighting the gust-buffeted controls, had Martha explain more fully what had happened. When she told him of her arrangement to contact Leslie, he frowned, whistled thoughtfully. "You're going to need some cover on that, I think. I'll go along."

"Hah! You took a big enough chance showing your face here in the village. But if you're seen in L.A. it's really the end."

He didn't press the matter, and they flew the next few miles without conversation, skimming along between the heavy black sky and the top of the tossing forest. When they neared the lodge he spoke. "Seems there's a lot taking place at once. Your running onto your brother, like you did, and the lab making that announcement a couple of hours ago."

"What?"

"Yeah. It's a gamble, they said, but they're pretty sure they've found a way to analyze the X-factor in the elixir. The gamble is this—the testing is going to take every drop that's left. And if they're mistaken . . . if something goes wrong during the analysis . . . if several unlucky things happen which could, according to the lab, then the show's over. There's going to be a vote on it tonight."

So it's finally come, thought Martha.

She stared through the faint reflection of herself in the window, stared past the pouring sky, looked into the backward-reaching vista of over a hundred years of research that had sought to discover the secret of the precious liquid. Men and women had died in that quest, killed by those who would take the balm for themselves, not knowing or caring for the psychological hemlock that, for the average person, lurked in each drop. And other men and women killed just as dead by experiments made upon themselves.

And the end was in sight . . .

"Andy, how long will it take to run the analysis?"

"A week, more or less." He pushed at the controls, throttled back. "We're home."

MATTHEWS, the group's top biochemist, took his place at the head of the huge table and cleared his throat. "If the group is assembled . . . ?" Eyebrows raised, he peered across the bright underground meeting room at Andy Smith.

"Thirty eight are present, Dr. Matthews. There are three guards up in the lodge. Louis Estranda is at the bar. The new workman, Letona . . . . . Simon Letona is outside work-

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ing on a coptor, and David Ganley is in his room. They said to say they'd go with the majority."

"Ganley, too . . . " Matthew ran his hand through his unruly iron-grey hair. "Very well." For a few long moments he was silent, staring abstractedly at the dark polished top of the table. "I don't know quite how to begin. When I was asked to conduct this session I first thought it would be a simple matter of asking you to vote whether or not we should risk the remaining elixir—as most of you term it—in a definitive analysis. But some of you, most of you, I suppose, have not been close to the technical side of the work. You who cook and serve, the maintenance men, guards, maids, mechanics . . . although you are all important members of the team, so to speak, doing jobs the remainder of us could not do, you are not sufficiently familiar with the scientific end of things to vote dispassionately. I'm afraid you all have either too much or too little trust in us so-called men of science."

A ripple of soft amusement eased the tension in the room. Matthews made his quick grimace of a smile. "So I'm afraid it is my duty to attempt a sort of lecture before we decide our lab procedure. Briefly, here is the situation. Within the week, we happened onto an utterly new method of analysis. It has proved itself to be ninety-three, point eight workable. By this, I mean, that when it does work, it is entirely accurate . . . down to the last electron of either organic or inorganic substances. But when it fails it is horribly wrong.

"As you can see, however, the chances of our new analysis explaining the final mystery of the elixir are very good. Ordinarily we would procede, either to run a test, or to take the next two years in eliminating that six, point two percentage of failure. Two factors have come up, however. The analysis can be conducted only upon a crystalline residue of the unknown substance. And if any life form is present in that substance, it is naturally killed by the conversion into crystalline form. Nor can most substances which contain organic matter before being converted be changed back into any decent semblance of their original form. So if the test is not accurate, if what the lab synthesizes after getting an analysis does not work . . . in our case, become the elixir . . . one must begin again. Unfortunately we cannot begin again, this time. We have barely sufficient fluid left to convert into the proper residue-form. There are but five ounces remaining of the elixir, and those five will make a mass so small as to infinitely complicate our—how shall I put it—our decoding after the analysis. The answer, you see, is obtained in the form of a wave, on an equation. And the smaller the amount tested, the longer our task of breaking down the math into chemical symbol and atomic structure."

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MATTHEWS frowned thoughtfully and adjusted his glasses. "Normally there would be but one sensible course for the researcher. As I have said, he would spend the necessary months or years in improving either his method of analysis, or in learning how to convert residue back into their original forms. But something has transpired which renders that impossible." The wiry little man peered about the room. "Miss North? As chief of security I think you should be the one to tell what that something is."

Martha spoke carefully from her seat next to Andrew. "We haven't much time left, I'm afraid. The Disciples—Thea Ganley and her crowd, of course—are opening a camp not ten miles from here. They're doing it for one reason; apparently they've narrowed the circle down to this particular area in the San Bernardino mountains. As soon as their camp meeting is in full swing, old Thea Ganley will have the word given and the entire congregation will become a horde of fanatical beaters. They will all be armed, no doubt, and possibly carrying detector units. We can't move away . . . we have too much heavy lab equipment, and we simply can't abandon everything to start over again in some safer spot. We're about out of funds. If you want my guess, I'd say we have about ten days more of relative safety here in the lodge." She glanced about, her grave gray eyes large and troubled. "We shouldn't become unduly alarmed; there's no immediate danger yet. But ten days . . . two weeks if we're lucky."

Attention in the quiet room gradually returned to Matthews. "Are there are any questions or comments before we put the matter to a vote?"

No one spoke.

"The test will take six days, I estimate." He waited. "Perhaps even a little longer."

The quiet grew almost audible.

"And we might be ruining the work of over a hundred years. Please think of that." So businesslike was Matthews, now, so brisk and professional, one might have thought him back in the U.S.. classroom from which he had "vanished" eight years before.

"Then if there is anyone opposed to submitting the remaining elixir to the analysis would he now speak."

The quiet continued for an eternity of sixty seconds.

"The analysis shall begin immediately," said Dr. Matthews. He turned from the table and left the room.

AT five the next day, Martha held Andrew Smith's hand in a brief goodby, then walked out into the bright spring afternoon to her coptor.

By five-forty, Smith—now with blue eyes instead of brown, with blond hair instead of brown, and wearing glasses and a moustache, shot his coptor into the air and headed for Los Angeles. All California seemed to be in the sky that day,

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and a dozen times he risked broken blades up in the crowded high speed level before cutting down close over the ground and skimming at better than three hundred, risking now the upbound traffic out of the spiral of suburbs, but making better time than before. By avoiding the legal patterns into Los Angeles, Andy arrived over Civic Center in time to spot Martha's coptor parking on a roof below. It had been neat timing, he congratulated himself. He hovered while below the foreshortened figure of the woman climbed out and entered the elevator, musing that perhaps he traded this piece of luck for that which had caught him up last time in Los Angeles. But he'd never quite made up his mind whether luck—good or bad — ran in cycles, or whether it simply alternated.

He swung down to a neat parking between Martha's Ford and a stately old three-bladed Hiller, climbed out, and began buzzing for the elevator.

Once in the streets it was not too difficult a matter to find her again, for her bright red hat signalled to him from a block away. He was but fifty feet behind her when she paused before the Library steps, seemingly concerned with brushing something from her left shoulder.

Andy stopped before a store window, regarded the display of books arranged within. He was too old a hand to be taken in by that shoulder-brushing routine. He'd used it too many times himself: It was an innocent movement that enabled one to sneak a look backward.

Whom had she spotted . . . himself, or one of the opposition?

He turned, walked toward her. She wasn't taken in by his disguise, for as he passed she spoke softly, busy now with rummaging through her purse. "Damn you, Smith! All right, get in there and wait for me."

Andy grinned, trotted up the wide steps.

WITHIN the library there were guide lines painted on the floor, leading one to the department one wished. He located the strip labled "Music," a vile green, and trailed up with it to the second floor, down a hall, and into a room lined with glassed-in cubicles, each containing either a playback or a piano. He paused before a music rack, studied it thoughtfully a few moments, then took down the heavy orchestral score of Brahms' "E Minor Symphony." As he turned the pages, hieroglyphic-covered for him, Martha sailed past and entered one of the piano rooms. He began to feel better; so far, so good. They were twenty minutes early, and it was doubtful if anyone would have established a watch in the library as yet.

Taking the score to a table that faced Martha's cell, he looked about at the others in the place. Everyone appeared to be authentically scholarly or musical, certainly more than he felt himself to be. Everyone, that

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s, save for one long-haired old codger in the corner with the flute case on the table before him. He was a bit too authentic. But that was another matter Andrew had never fully decided to his satisfaction: Was one less suspect wearing a bright red coat and a button labled "Spy," or so drab and vague as to be typical?

After determining the room's other exits he settled down to peruse the boring score.

Fifteen minutes until.

At eight minutes to seven, Martha saw her brother enter the room. He was wearing a sombre grey tweed suit, and his expression was one of mild annoyance. Martha got up from the little piano and beckoned to Leslie.

"You're early," she said closing the glass door. Andy, she glimpsed, was staring at the ceiling over her head, apparently lost in Brahms-inspired raptures. Despite her nervousness, she chuckled, for she knew the man to be not only musically illiterate, but quite tone deaf.

"What's funny, kid?" asked Leslie. He took the chair behind the spinet and rested one arm on top of the cabinet.

Martha resumed her bench before the keyboard. "One of the patrons out there . . . the blond fellow being simply sent by a thick score."

North didn't bother to look. Instead, he surveyed his sister. "You seem fit. How long has it been now? Over two years, hasn't it?"

She touched the keys lightly, began playing a soft and easy Gershwin tune from long ago. "That's right. Your first leave. Two and a half years back. How long have you been out? Why didn't you write?"

North's eyes wandered from hers. "I was discharged a couple of weeks ago. Not honorably, not dishonorably. You may not believe this, but I was framed out. By whom, or for why, I don't know. I don't much care any more."

He told her briefly of his dismissal, adding that being asked to join the Disciples was the first thing that had presented itself.

"But you were wearing the robe of a Thane, Les. I'd have thought one had to first be an apprentice or be trained or something."

"Yeah." Les scowled, chewed his lip. "That sort of puzzled me, too, but they explained that my technical knowledge was what they wanted. They're quite an organization, kid. They're doing big things in the borderline sciences, the stuff between mysticism and electronics. Fascinating. But suppose you pitch in, now, and explain why you cut up so last night." The annoyance returned to his face as he regarded her.

"Did you mention meeting me to anyone?"

North was indignant. "Hell no. You scared me into thinking that you were in trouble or something. I told you I wouldn't say anything."

"Good." For a few moments, Martha gentled the keys, marshalling the words to the story she had to tell

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her brother.

THE Disciples say (she told him) that they began as a social club, endowed by some rich industrialist when he died. Later, they claim one of their members, an explorer, found some tablets in the Lemurian dredgings that the National Geographic Society expedition had missed. The tablets turned out to be the mystical revelations around which this so-called social club metamorphosed into a religion—the Disciples. No, wait please, Leslie, I'm just quoting what everyone has been told about the group. Please let me say it all before we start arguing . . . although I hope to God that won't be necessary. So the social club turned to philosophical pursuits, learned to do near-miracles, accepted members, provided entertainment on almost any level. It became a paying business, as well as—so you say—a scientific attack upon mysticism. It grew amazingly fast . . . and it's becoming a power politically. Is that agreed, Leslie? Good. Now strip away your peeve with me, your enthusiasm for the Disciples—although I can hardly blame you for having either—and pay open-minded attention to a story I'm going to tell you. It's about a young fellow named Ganley. David Ganley, the tenth son of a family of thirteen children. He was born in Louisiana, and left there when he was thirteen to make his fortune fighting Indians or finding treasure or whatever appealed to kids back in the middle eighteen-hundreds or there-abouts. For a while he bummed up and down the Mississippi; then he struck out West. Be patient, Les, please. Now there's something I want you to remember about David Ganley — he'd never been to school, he could barely read or write his name. He wasn't too bright even, which isn't remarkable when one considers his genetical background; a lout of a tavern keeper and a Cajun waitress. He grew up in bickering and poverty and trouble and sordidness. Ok. He struck out West, as I said, and after a few years of trapping and clearing land and bumming, he managed to become a buffalo hunter. In that, Les, it seems he finally found himself. He was a successful man . . . made lots of money, helped slaughter literally thousands and thousands of animals. I guess that'll do for David Ganley for a few minutes. Now I'll tell you something about me. Please, darling, stop glowering and drumming your fingers. The stories manage to tie up . . . all three of them; the Disciples, David Ganley, and your sister. Here, I'll play you that old Carmichael tune you always liked. What's its name? Something about stars. Stardust? Well . . . I took graduate work at U.S.C., remember? I was going to be a big-shot lady, a botanist, no less. Well, as you know, I got out of it. The Revolution in Europe seemed such a bigger, more important thing than . . . than pondering the sex-life of wild strawberries. So

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I got Dad to give me money for a trip to Argentina, and I used it to go to Africa. And, as you know, I got involved in the back-stage of the war over there. A real spy lady. Gun and cloak and truth-juice and everything. And when I came home . . . Well, that's where what you and the family thought happened, and what *really* happened, part company. You think I got married and went to Mexico. I didn't. There never was a Ralph Mendoza . . . he's an imaginary character. I had to make him up, though; had to have Mexican pictures of us faked and letters sent from down there. I'll tell you why. Three years before you enlisted — June of nineteen-seventy four, I was wandering around up in the Lake Arrowhead region when I came across one of my old professors from U.S.C. days. Dr. Ralph Matthews. He seemed surprised to see me—why, I couldn't see, for I thought that teachers must forever be running onto their former students. And then I remembered. Right in mid sentence of asking him about his work I remembered: Dr. Ralph Matthews had been headline news for a few days. He'd disappeared a year before. Vanished. And here I was talking with him. But when I looked more carefully, I began wondering. This man, this person who apparently recognized *me*, and who was talking about my days in college was a bit different—he had a moustache, different hair-line . . . I couldn't be sure. Well, Leslie, the outcome was that we fenced with each other for almost two hours before I got up nerve to ask him about the disappearance, and if he was the Ralph Matthews, or his brother or something. He waited quite a while before replying, then instead of answering my questions, he began questioning me. Wanted to know what I was doing now that I was back from the European Revolt. Asked me what I had done over there . . . whether or not I had any responsibilities, any plans. I told him of mom's and dad's death, and how you were taking post grad work, and that I was ready for anything interesting. So he invited me to go with him and meet someone. And on the way he told me a story. It was about a young fellow who had run away from his mean father and his filthy mother and his twelve brothers and sisters . . . You've got it. He told me about David Ganley.

ANYTHING you'd like me to play for you? I'm a little at a loss how to take the next plunge. Ok. Well, I met David Ganley that evening. And he wasn't a hundred and some years old; at least not apparently. He was a rakish looking fellow of about my own age. But, Les, he was the same man. I met others that evening, too. People who had given up everything else to search for the secret of Ganley's refusal to age. Some of them, like Dr. Matthews, had chosen to disappear from their former worlds. Others, like myself, invented and maintained fake ad-

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dresses and equally phony lives. I knew I couldn't simply disappear . . . you're the snoopy kind . . . you wouldn't have rested till you found me, bless you, so I palmed off that insipid Latin on you through the mails. I knew you'd hate the description of him so that you'd never dare to attempt to visit. And by the way, thanks for the "wedding present." It's still keeping excellent time.

Anyway, Les, I became a member of the organization that was trying to analyze the stuff that kept Ganley from aging. It had been given him, generations ago, when he was wounded, and he'd so noticed the effects of his first sip that he kept the rest and used it whenever he felt sick or slowed up. Almost thirteen years passed before the man noticed he wasn't getting any older, and before he found that a really big gulp of the liquid would actually take years away. He settled on an apparent thirty-two or so, and took one tiny swallow a year to keep himself there. Then he became frightened. What would happen when it was all gone? He tried to locate the source, but that didn't work. He tried having it analyzed . . .it only managed to cause a mild flurry amongst the chemists who were baffled. So finally, he located a distant relation of his . . . a Ganley whom he met in California while panning for gold. Together, they set out to break down the elixir—we call it that, Leslie. But the small-town doctor that was this other Ganley couldn't keep his mouth shut. He mentioned something of what he was doing to *his* relatives, most of them Ganleys, and in a very short time he was murdered by someone attempting to steal the remaining liquid. The killer was the founder of a long list of other killers. I wonder if the name Thea Ganley means anything to you. I see not. Well, if you were a good eager Thane long enough it would. Ok, sorry Les. So there sprang up two camps—one dedicated to deciphering the weird ingredients that constitute the stuff, and the other composed chiefly of wealthy Ganley descendants who had banded together to swipe the remaining mix. Through the years it seemed that the calibre of men who were actively engaged in quiet research became so head and shoulder above the rival Ganley faction that an almost moral aspect entered the struggle. The former — we, Leslie, want the secret for humanity. That sounds horribly priggish and high-sounding, I know. But it's true. We want to turn the formula over to some powerful branch of the U.N. which will see to it that it's used to help the world. It can keep scientists alive long enough to see them through their concepts. It can keep composers going, philosophers. But not the Ganleys—and not you and me. Why? I'll tell you: Old David Ganley is a living example of what happens when a poorly integrated and poorly adjusted person is afflicted with immortality. The good and the bad, the

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chaotic and the ordered, the selfish and the unselfish, the brave and the cowardly . . . the entire plus and minus aspects of the person grow apace and separate and make continual warfare. How David Ganley has kept his sanity this long I don't know, unless it's because he was never too bright. The person of average intelligence would become either a saint or a devil, actually. And I fear there is more of hell in all of us than heaven.

So, Leslie, can't you see why we couldn't come out in the open with our research? And certainly, you understand why we had to keep the elixir from the Ganleys. We know what they'd do with it if they could synthesize it . . . gulp it themselves, then settle down to peddling the brew. And the price would go up for the eighth or tenth dose, you may be sure. They could get a hold on the world.

THE Disciples? They formed their "social club" with the Disciples in mind. They had to have power and funds to fight us. We obtained our funds from the incidental discoveries made which happened to have commercial or scientific value. The Holtz tube, for instance: Ephram Rabinowitz happened onto that circuit back in Nineteen fifty-four, and it was peddled outright to the Holtz Laboratories. And "gonazone" . . . that was a sideline discovery that was accidental. Dick Ganley was looking for a method of breaking down a certain kind of mold that attacks . . . Oh, never mind about that. We've supported ourselves with the side pickings. The Ganleys, faced with the same problem, melded their fortunes and when those ran low, started the Disciples. It was quite a move . . . it is making them plenty of money, to buy their way into chemical supply houses to watch for our orders, and to hire thugs to try to root us out. These conversions you read about recently, such as Father Marek's startling recantation of Catholicism . . . they're done with drugs. Mostly, the simple Mindzenty shots, but on others they use hyno-serums of their own devising. Two gets you one that the disappearance of Ginny Harris could be explained by those high in Disciple circles. I'll bet you she'll emerge in a few days or weeks, an ardent fan or even member of your cult.

Oh, Leslie, Leslie . . . didn't you wonder in the least why it was so simple for you to enter the Disciples? Didn't you ask yourself why you could be picked up off a bench in Santa Monica and put into Thane robes overnight? They're after me, Les . . . me through you. They framed you out of the Air Corps for that reason. Can't you see it? I'm in charge of security for our people. Call it what you will, counter murder or what, I was chosen because of my experience in Europe and the name I made for myself there. I don't care for my job, either, but I'll do it because I *do* care for

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what I'm helping bring about—hundreds of years of life for those who deserve it and can handle it, and eventual immortality for anyone — everyone. And they know if they can take me they might eventually break me down and locate our headquarters. They're wrong, of course, because I'd kill myself first. This is a much more honest cause to me than any war or revolt or border-squabble that's happened in my lifetime. This is man, himself, Les, and I'm all for mankind. Just as I'm against that aspect of mankind the Ganley-Disciple crowd represents. I . . . I don't know what else to say.

Leslie North watched as the tears gathered and trembled in his sister's eyes. She put her elbow on the music rack of the spinnet and covered her eyes with her hands.

He got out two cigarettes, lit them, gave her one.

It was all he could think of to do. Then he started getting angry!

WITH grim approval, Andrew Smith noted the drawn expression of anger and of determination on Leslie North's lean face as he emerged from the cubicle with his sister. They left the music room, Martha with a tiny nod to Andy in passing, so he put away the Brahms score and followed them from the library. The steel and concrete towers outside were giving up their day's accumulated heat and the evening air was warm. Leisurely, Smith kept his distance behind the couple as they made their way through the sound and color of the crowds.

At the street entrance to the parking lot elevator he waited while North took the woman's hand and spoke to her a moment. Then she stepped inside. Both men watched the indicator needle sweep around to the top, then both took in each other.

North came up, paused at his side while lighting a cigarette. Through a shield of cupped hands he said, "Thanks, Smith. Take care of her, huh?" Throwing the smoking match away he exhaled a narrow fan of smoke, nodded to Andy, then merged away into the crowd.

Yeah, I'll watch her, thought Smith. But who's going to be taking care of you?

He reached the roof in time to see Martha's coptor rise into the bright night sky and take its place in the stream of Eastbound traffic. In a few moments he was at her altitude and jockeying around and even over other vehicles in order to keep the picture of her ship on his screen. But the traffic was unusually heavy, and although he kept receiving her code signal automatically, showing a distance of but a quarter of a mile, the scope on the dash kept wowing as the mass of other craft intercepted his beams . . . which was all right for simply keeping a distance contact, but not good enough if they were being tailed.

Reaching out he thumbed the stud that dialed the present number of her

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ship. "Hi, Red hat. Smith. Listen, there's too much window-flicker on radar, so how about dropping out of this lane. I can't keep a decent weave going. Ok?"

The image of the ship detached itself from his level and diminished in size as it lagged behind the center bead on the screen. Through the plastic floor he saw her lights; she had put a green blinker going on the whirling outer tip of the blades, and spinning on-off disc of light was easy to follow. "Keep it at that altitude for a moment, Martha, and swing south a little. I suppose we're clear, but . . . "

He saw it first on radar.

ANOTHER ship had separated from the stream and was lagging behind, diminishing in size as it changed course to follow Martha. Cursing, he switched the radar from "general" to "spot" and maneuvered the narrow search beam till his scope showed up the tail—a fast custom job with pulse-ram rotors.

And through the clear floor, almost dead center between his feet, he next saw it unaided; the dull platter of blades burning clear against the blackness down below.

Smith was puzzled. Not only was the craft a ram job, but it was showing its riding lights. Maybe he was mistaken . . . maybe he was a little snoop-happy. Could anyone be stupid enought to use a ram coptor for a tailing?

"Hey, Martha, there's someone with us, I think. Could be wrong, but suppose you swing back into the lane. I'll stay down here and watch for a minute."

Obediently, Martha's ship climbed back up and swung left toward the busy transcontinental level.

On the screen and visually, Smith saw the other craft swing along with it as if attached.

This was it.

"Martha . . . "

"He's still with me?"

"Yes. I'm going to make 'em go away, kid. You beat it back on home. Don't fly all the way . . . ditch your ship in Berdoo and if there's any other tail, well . . . you know how to shake it." He found rough amusement in what he'd said. "And I'll bet you could, too, if you'd just let go once. So long, darling."

He switched off, pushed the controls forward and bore down on the throttle. Darling . . darling . . The word had come unbidden, he'd never meant for her to know. Darling . . .

Larger grew the fast arc of the flame-tipped blades, and bright the glow of the oncoming cabin. Larger and brighter and larger till he could make out the four men in the other ship. Three of them had hoods over their heads.

Smith put a cigarette into his mouth and bit down on it fiercely.

And the world vanished in a frightful racket and rending as the coptor blades met and chewed in an insane dueling.

(To be concluded next issue)

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YELISEN

By Richard S. Shaver

The worlds of the Horn had been free from exploration — until the beauty of an ageless woman threatened their age-old peace.

OLD Reuel clenched a thin fist, his eyes on the dark shape in the sky.

The boy, Vard, clenched a small fist too, and set himself as if it were his own body about to take the shock, out there in the storm of death.

On came the dark disk, pierced by tiny flickering eyes, reflected flashes of the flaming lances of rays from the battling ships about the asteroid.

Reuel could remember the day when the Earthmen stepped from their shining star-craft out upon the soil of Num Tarem. From that day, Evard had been chosen as home by the men from the stars, and had re-

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They faced the spy's jeday weapon with horror and revulsion — and fear.

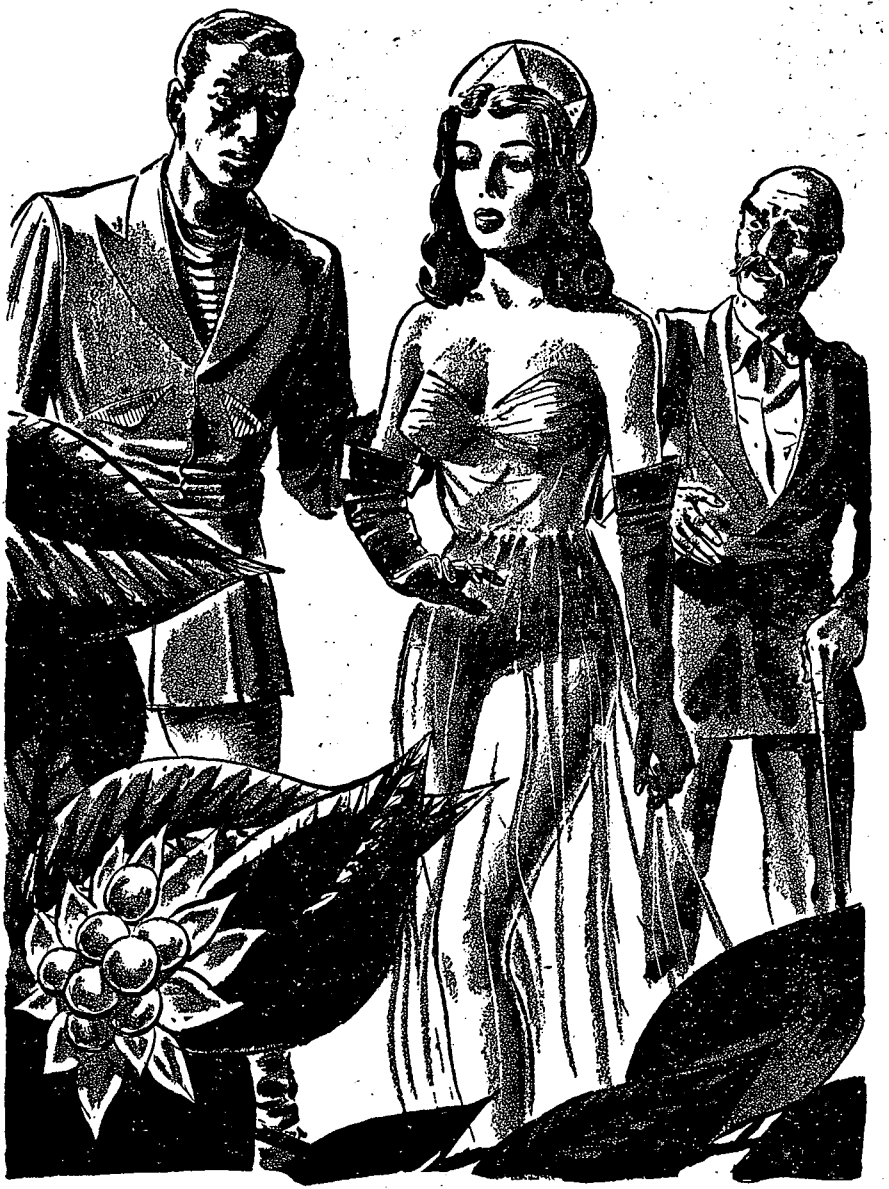

Illustration by Bill Terry

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mained inviolate.

Vard looked up into old Reuel's eyes. To both of them it seemed impossible that the Hai-han—"Sons of Death"—could be so foolhardy as to attack Evard, the chosen of the men from the stars. Cayr, where the Hans came from, lay just across a range of mountains and beyond a sea of glistening green crystals, strange result of some peculiar long-past volcanic outpoor. Earthmen had always left Cayr severely alone. The race of Han were warlike, and Earthmen never looked for trouble except to stop it. The Han had been awed by the sky-ships for nearly thirty years, had ignored the Earthmen in turn. But now a new space craft was moving in the skies. The "Sons of Death," the Han secret organization, had been building copies of Earth ships in secret.

In the gardens under the window where the old man and the boy watched, the spy was a gliding shadow. Evard is the capital of the Earth colony, and considering the battle going on overhead in the distant skies, that shadow should have been noticed. But it was very good shadow cloth and the spy very experienced in its use. Removing the glass from the wall of the herbarium gave out only the tiniest tinkle of sound. In an instant the gliding shadow had disappeared among the interior shadows.

AT an ornate desk in the center of the big room sat a handsome man of thirty-five, working over sheaves of official-looking papers. His face was bronzed, and scarred across the cheek with the cicatrice of a needle-ray. He looked out of place at a desk. His big hands, scarred and calloused and rough, handled the papers with a distinct slowness, looking twice at everything — brooding over the paper skeleton of a tremendous organization.

Paul Daniels was putting the affairs of the Masson Trading Corporation in order after the death of his friend and boss, Henry Masson. Masson had hired Daniels years ago, after he had been fired for being too honest to work for a snide outfit called "Space Homes, Inc." whose specialty had been selling colonizers land that no one could live on permanently. To Daniels, Masson had been that rarest of humans, an honest idealist, and he had given him fifteen years of devotion and hard work.

Now his loyalty was to Masson's widow. He had to get things in order, keep Masson Trading going, or the sharks of a dozen planets would be there to devour the corpse and deprive the widow of her immense possessions. The worlds of the Horn had been a plum Masson had pulled out of the hands of the pirates who had made a wreck of Earth's colonization, by acquiring exclusive rights to trade in the whole Horn area. Keeping that exclusive right now that Masson was dead was Daniels' problem.

"They'll never check this asteroid,

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it's too big," the boy cried, leaning out as if to leap from the window when the walls crushed down under the dread weight.

Paul Daniels got up from the desk, to watch over the old man's shoulder. This was the third night of fear for Evard. The Hai-han had to be taught a lesson soon!

He hated to order general bombing of the Han cities. Cayr was very ancient and very beautiful. Some of the others were as fine, and he liked the common people of the Han nations. But these Hai-han, these "Sons of death," were something else again. Just how to stop them without destroying everything the old man had built up here over fifty years? The men of Earth were liked, respected, trusted — everywhere in the Horn. Would it be the same after they had blasted the life out of the Han?

The shape of the falling asteroid blotted out the Dragon, spread wider, engulfed Bootes, swallowed up Libra. Then, something unseen tugged at it. The collossal mass jerked as the hammer blows of repelling impulses from the ships jarred and jarred again.

Slowly, so very slowly, the vast weight of the thing began to veer from the center-line of sure destruction. Old Reuel let out his held breath explosively.

Daniels sighed, knowing the Hell of effort going on in those ships, operating at velocities that would leave their bodies racked with ruptured veins, damaged organs, leaking hearts and agonizing aches in every muscle.

Daniels felt those agonies. He himself had been through war in space, but never in the Horn. The old man had wanted to keep war out of the Horn. If only those Han leaders understood what Henry Masson had been trying to do all these years—keeping back the crooked traders and the sharpers of the colonizing schemes while he built a strong armor of unshakable decency about the name of the Masson Trading Corporation. Only the best and the straightest got through to the Horn, the rest were turned back by a dozen agents in their employ. The old man hadn't wanted to see the Horn go as Mars had gone in the beginning of space exploitation. As, later, the other colonizing schemes had gone. He had wanted the Horn to grow its own culture, its own highly developed interplanetary commerce, with only a little peace-making and trading by themselves to finance the necessary police work.

Maybe Masson was an idealist, but he was a practical man, too. Even the Central Authority on Earth thought of the Horn as "backwater" and steered away a lot of unpleasant pressure to open it up. The Horn was not going to "open up" to ungoverned exploitation—not if Paul Daniels could find a way to carry on the old man's ideas.

And now to have the Hai-han strike at them, after protecting them

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from Earth for fifty years! It was ironic . . . Those Earth men out there battling the shiny new Han ships in their aging commercial craft had been the Han's best friends, if they only knew it.

IT had all started when Masson had presented each of the most prominent of the rulers of adjacent planets with a pleasure yacht. Masson's idea had been to show them he had no objection to space travel for the many races of the Horn. In fact, he wanted them to develop a natural intercourse between the worlds, wanted them to begin to build craft of all kinds and to engage in trade. He wanted them, in time, to become so self sufficient there would be no room for another outfit from Earth to take over his work and corrupt the natural goodness of these worlds.

But he had reckoned without the Hai-han, the left hand of the Han rulers. It had been that for centuries. The Hai-han did the dirty work while the rulers "deplored" the state of affairs.

The Hai-han had straightway started building a fleet of war-craft, using the gift ship as a model. Masson had not learned of these secret ships.

Now, after Masson's death, the Earthmen found themselves in battle with the Hai-han, equipped with new ships. Not only that, but they had simultaneously to battle the attackers and divert from their course the vast rocks the Hai-han had towed into collision orbits.

Daniels cursed silently. He wouldn't have a clean ship left. Every hull would be bent, twisted, half wrecked —let alone the holes the Hans must be shooting into them.

He saw Mrs. Masson standing in the doorway, watching the three of them, and the awe the Evra woman always aroused in him swept him in a tingling wave.

His heart always rose to this woman as a ship rises to a swell in the ocean—a mysterious ocean of unknown surprise. Daniels turned, letting his eyes rest on her, letting his mind drink in the gentle lines of her utterly graceful body, the delicate hands slowly twisting each the other, the glowing brilliance of her eyes, tear-dimmed now with loving the hard men in the space battle. Loving their courage and knowing it was all really for her, because they wanted her to be the head of Masson, rather than some stranger, or some alien like Franel of the Hai-han.

The Evra were long-lived, like most of the Horn peoples, having a life-span almost four times that of the Earthmen. They were a quiet race, studious, enamoured of music and conversation and long ceremonious feasts. They were an emotional people, intensely loyal, hard to anger but relentless once wrought up to it.

Daniels understood exactly why Masson had married her. She was perhaps the most beautiful creature

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he had ever seen.

Yelisen came in quietly, and stood peering up at the thing in the sky. Slowly it veered and passed on at last, beyond the dark horizon.

Her eyes were moist with thinking of the heroic men above in their careening shells of metal, with knowing that many of them said their prayers with her name mingled in the words, somewhere, right beside their God's. She had heard the tapes, taken during the battle, heard the straining men cry out as they shot down a Hai-han ship:

"That's for Yelisen, you dirty S. O. B.'s"

Yelisen had asked Daniels what S.O.B. meant, and he had explained it was a religious expression.

Yelisen didn't realize that if she hadn't refused to see the Hai-han leader Franel this whole thing might not have happened. The Earthmen had not explained to her.

The voice was low in Daniel's ear. "Who would have thought of this tactic of throwing rocks." She laughed a little. "It is just like Franel. When he was a little boy, visiting with his father at my father's house, he would throw stones and get whipped for it.

Old Reuel gave a start at her voice, not knowing she was just behind him. Daniels answered her, wishing she understood the seriousness of the situation.

"Your friend Franel did not think we could turn them, or he would not have wasted the labor of towing them so far. The Han are not fond of labor."

Yelisen frowned. "The ruler of the brawling Hai-Han is not my friend, Paul! Just because he courted me in the days when Earth was but an unknown star to us, does not mean that I hold affection for him! I do not. I did not then."

"Just sarcasm, Yelisen. He should be a friend to us, but he is too ignorant of our work to understand we are a valuable protection to him and to his people. You know it is you he is after, perhaps more than the Masson grants, don't you?"

Yelisen smiled, and waved a long hand in delightful pantomime of turning down a suitor. "Franel is not eligible, Paul."

Daniels did not smile, only stared intently into the deep yellow-green eyes. These Evra people, who lived so much longer, had always a greater fund of experience, a more intricate subtlety in their thinking. It was hard to be quite sure of their intentions. Hard to be sure they did not read more into one's words than was meant to be there. Paul spoke slowly, in Evra, giving every word the exact nuance, an error in which could change the meaning so much if not exactly correct.

"No, Yelisen, you are not to marry this Prince Franel, this would-be warlord, whatever else of that kind you may do later. You must not marry the wrong man as long as the Masson grants are in your name. Central Authority on Earth would

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immediately cancel the grants, label them invalid after passing into the hands of a person of questionable loyalty to the World Government. Then they would issue new grants to some lobbyist, who would sell them to the highest bidder. We'd be dispossessed, and the worlds of the Horn would become the battleground for a hundred struggling piratical groups eager to get rich and go back home."

YELISEN eyed him doubtfully, her hands toying with the emerald and gold belt about her smooth waist, tightly drawn over the brown silk, accenting her breasts, the curve of her hips. Her voice was honey-sweet and mocking him a little.

"Paul, that might be a good thing. One could go away, then, forget about work and worry and entertaining visiting dignitaries. One could visit the other worlds, perhaps even go to Earth. It might be an opportunity!"

Daniels seized her hands, dragged her to a chair, made her sit. "Now listen, Mrs. Masson: yes, it would be fun! That is granted! Do you wish to desert your people, turn them over to an organization that would loot their homes of everything available, turn them off their land and sell it, put every man to work for token wages? Do you want to do that?"

Yelisen shook her head slightly, her eyes still mocking him. Paul did not realize she was way ahead of him. He went on, his voice both angry and pleading, both patient and tense. "A stranger would come and order you out of your own home. Then you could watch the peaceful worlds of the Horn crushed one by one into a mold of harsh discipline, of total production. People would die in hopeless wars, trying to resist. The exploiters would come from the ends of space, eager to get in on a good thing. The beauty and the peace, the rights of the common man to his land and his work—all would perish. We have worked hard under your husband to build the strength to resist corruption, Yelisen. You can't throw away our work!"

Yelisen composed her lovely mouth into an expression of complete seriousness, but her eyes twinkled on Paul's with an inner amusement that he should think her so dense. She folded her hands, sat up straight and with complete dignity which somehow denied all dignity—her voice meek obedience which yet told Paul she had never obeyed anyone except it pleased her.

"Yes, Paul. Swamped we would be, corruption would run over us on ugly iron feet, bad people come in clouds of warships, terrible things happen. Yes, I see!"

"Rank, selfish commercialism, this far from the laws of Earth, Yelisen, can be a terrible thing. Never believe that all Earth people are like those you have known. Your husband never allowed the other kind to learn about the Horn."

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Yelisen leaned toward him, took his hands in hers, looked into his eyes with all mockery banished from her face. "Would it be so bad, really, Paul? I would like to be free of this responsibility, but if I cannot be free, then I cannot. Must I be your *boss?*"

Paul turned his head away, unable to bear her eyes upon his own for reasons he couldn't fathom. "You can ask? Didn't Masson ever explain his work, Yelisen? If the wrong people grab for the Horn, bid goodbye to freedom forever. You have never seen regimentation. I have seen it, your husband had experienced it. It isn't good, to force the many into slavery to the few. It becomes hell for everyone."

Yelisen patted his hand, stood up. Her voice was full of subtle laughter again, as she said:

"I am legal owner, you are my manager. You will just say to them, no! No, you may not do this!"

Paul sighed, and twisted on the tines of her tormenting. Of course she understood all this; she just wanted to make him explain, wanted to test and probe him. But he had to make sure she understood.

"Yes, Yelisen, you are in legal possession of the Horn trading rights as the widow of Henry Masson. But legality would mean nothing if certain people knew the value of this area. The grants were given Masson in complete ignorance of the true value of the Horn cluster. Central Authority has been kept in ignorance. We have been to endless pains to keep them so. We need you for titular head to keep things as they are. You must allow nothing to stop our work here. You are our only protection from the evil side of Earth life; ours—and all the many people of the worlds of the Horn suns."

Yelisen's artful mouth dropped open in pretended stupefaction as she considered the magnitude of Paul's all-inclusive statement. It isn't possible for one woman to be that important, Paul!"

"Not one woman, Yelisen. But the name of Masson that you bear, the grants issued fifty years ago. Back there, they don't know yet that the people of the Horn worlds live four and five lifetimes to their one. They must never learn that, for it means these worlds are far more healthful than Earth. Immigration would swamp us. The work we have done in screening incoming personnel, the work we have done proving the grants, enforcing discipline here so that no whisper of the true value of the Horn gets back—would be lost. You must understand!"

Yelisen frowned. Her hands went to her face as if horrified. "To keep your own race away, when they too could live longer? It seems a cosmic crime!"

Paul Daniels almost gave up. But doggedly he went on in the face of her complete refusal to agree with him. It just wasn't possible the old man had never discussed these things with her. But he had to be sure she

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knew her role, or the whole scheme would blow up in their faces. Her voice went on, lovely, cadenced as music, containing every emotional nuance calculated to goad him into still greater effort to tell her what she must understand. The Evra loved Earthmen, but they loved to probe them with their sharper, older wits, to watch the good grain of their character betray itself . . . and Yelisen was mistress of the art. Her expression was one of absolute disgust with his unhumanity to his own race . . .

"Earthmen have been looked upon as Gods by the Evra! They came here from far away, with their terrible weapons, frightening us into despair. Then they showed everyone the utmost kindness, were good to everyone—they have kept Evard inviolate ever since. They have loved us, married our women, settled here among us, are a part of Evard. Why should you deny that right to other men of Earth?"

Daniels' jaw was grim. Watching her act, he was beginning to see her complete pleasure in his strong reactions. But he had to thrash it over with her, in spite of her refusal to admit any knowledge of affairs. Her fair head was outlined against the dark night sky, against the distant moving lines of fire in that night.

MASSON'S son, young Vard, came up to Yelisen, pressed his bright face into her sweet-scented hair, whispered: "Mother, I am going to bed, if you will promise to awaken me when anything important happens?"

Yelisen turned, kissed him gently, stroked his fine brown hair. As he left she called, "I will not let you miss anything, Vard, you know that!"

Yelisen's father, old Reuel, cried out in sudden exulting tones, "They're moving on out, Paul! The fleet is moving out: they've got the Hai-han on the run!"

His face was wrinkled with a thousand lines of old man's glee as Yelisen cried after him, "I can see the jets of fire all trailing the same. See, Paul, like a great rake of fire, the teeth all point this way!"

Daniels sprang to the filagree of bronze in the lower half of the big round window. The old man, in his third century by Earth time, had sharp eyes still. The fleet *was* moving out. The fiery comet tails of flight were parallel, making an infinitely fine grid of gold lace in the sky between Cepheus and the Dragon. In spite of himself Daniels gave a cry of exulting relief. His arm went around Yelisen and crushed her to his shoulder; the other hand swatted the ancient's back.

Reuel coughed, took hold of the grill to steady himself. "Take it easy, wildling! It is but a maneuver! Franel has just gone to get more rocks. The Hai-han will not give up till their life-blood is properly spilled, or ours. I know them. Through two centuries of war, in

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my youth, I fought against the Hai-han. Fear will not make them quit. They must be blooded out!"

Daniels sobered, released Mrs. Masson, gave her an embarrassed glance. He hadn't known how tense he had been until the sight of possible victory shining from that grid of moving light in the night had brought relief.

Yelisen gave him a grave kiss, quick and sweet as a mother's to a child, to celebrate. It had exactly the same lack of sensual meaning, too. Paul turned back to the center of the office-like chamber, opened the cigarette box of gray lizard skin worked over with the Evard wolf in gold. He puffed nervously, then forced himself to relax, settled down in the wide chair with the golden eagle's spread wings making the back. He switched on the teleplex, of Evra manufacture, which they had learned to make and use since Earthmen came. But he could not bring his mind to the task of translating the swift Evra syllables into meaning. He knew they were retailing the news of the Hai-han attack and repulse.

Sitting there, Paul's mind went back to the days when Henry Masson had been a young adventurer, staking his fortune on the chance the Horn area was of value. He had won; the star cluster proved to be a little universe, rich in natural wealth, rich in civilized and peaceful people, ready to welcome the sky ships. Masson had sent back a false report, to keep out the vultures.

Masson must have known from the first the day would come when some of these numerous people would make a bid for power over the whole cluster. Paul wondered if he had foreseen that his widow would have to face the greed of Franel so soon after his death, if he had not planned for someone to take over, instead of dropping the whole loosely held empire of trade in her lap overnight. Masson's death had hit her hard. Paul knew his death was the work of the Hai-han—it was too pat. They had been secretly building copies of the Earth ships for twenty years to get ready for this day. It was so obvious! If Franel could force Yelisen to marry him the whole thing would be legally his! Or so he thought. He might be right. To the authorities on Earth the place *was* a backwater, valueless.

Paul laughed, thinking of Franel's face the day he had come calling, in all his decorations, his uniform resplendent, wearing two swords . . . a blaze of Han sartorial perfection. And Yelisen had utterly refused to speak with him, saying she was "too busy." No wonder he was throwing rocks!

Daniels got up to close the shutters. They were armor-plate steel, installed by Masson when the place was reconstructed from an abandoned Evra stronghold. They could all be dropped by pressing one button in the floor on the other side of the

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teleplex cabinet.

The spy must have been standing there a long time, making sure of them. He moved out of the shadows, where the plants of the herbarium breathed in the darkness. The jeday in his hand threw reflected light in a venomous play all along the barrel.

DANIELS saw him first, but the switch was too far away to drop the shutters and prison him. The thought had come too late. Daniels stood quietly, gathering his strength, steeling his nerves, until Yelisen turned and put her hand to her mouth with a cry of surprise. Old Reuel heard her, whirled around, swore lustily in dark Evra syllables—oaths that swore away that spy's soul to a thousand damnations. It was the sight of the Han's favorite torture weapon in the man's hand that infuriated the old man.

"Bastard of Han, how did you get in here?"

The smooth pink face of the barbarian smiled, the blond mustache parting. His spread mouth showed red and moist as a girl's. Only the eyes were hard, blue-white diamonds glittering, glancing here, there and everywhere over the room as he made sure there were but the three of them.

Daniels' voice sounded nasty as a saw hitting a nail: "What do you want here, Han? The battle's out there in space!"

The Han's speech had hardly any accent. Speaking Evra, Daniels would have taken him for one of them. "But the *prize* of battle is here, outlander! Here in this room."

"And what is that prize?" asked Daniels, knowing the answer, hating the man for knowing it too.

The spy switched to bad English, showing off his accomplishment. "Ah wan one theeng only, Meester Boss. If you wan to be more in life, keep hands still." He switched back to Evra, his voice respectful again. "Come, Lady Yelisen, honor awaits you in the court of the Prince, our leader. You go with me now to the Lord Franel."

Daniels raged inwardly. He could not move without bringing possible injury to the old man and the woman. These Han warriors were a very different animal from an Evra; Daniels knew their penchant for bloodletting. Han meant "son" in Evra and in Han. A han is a "son of earth" and a Hai-han a "son of death." The word for earth, "lan" had been dropped from the race name. A Hai-han is a man dedicated to death as a priest to his god. On the spy's face Daniels' racing mind imagined he could read the thought of recent events—that the Earthmen had held the Hai-han back from war too long. That was over now, the Hai-han had built ships, too! Those new ships had filled the Hai-han with pride.

Yelisen moved forward to stand by Paul's side in the disk of light thrown off by the humming teleplex screen. She swayed slightly, the long

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intoxicating line of thigh and leg outlined under the sheer bright sheen of the red-brown silk. The spy's eyes moved to her face, remained there in fascination. Yelisen spoke slowly, to make sure of no misunderstanding.

"If it is gold that will buy you, I have it for you. If it is immunity from the Hai-han vengeance, I can obtain it for you. If pleasure will bribe you, I can have that too arranged for you. Only leave this house and these friends intact. I promise, by the word of a Reuel!"

The man's slightly mocking grin widened. "If I trusted you, and I do, I would still have to refuse. I have so much more fear of your enemies than of you, Yelisen. So I choose to deliver you to your enemies, for they would kill me if I sold myself to you."

Daniels felt the weakness of despair. He knew what it would mean if this fool completed his errand. It was somewhat like a nomad inviting the heiress to his yurt—or like an ant courting a peacock. To Yelisen, the barbarian prince's harem must be the least desirable of fates. But, with her in his power, Franel could rule the Horn. Earth would send ships, supplies, arms, to Yelisen's signed order—for awhile. Until somebody got wise, or until some of them got back to Earth and spilled the beans. Without her, it was probable that "Lord" Franel would not even rule his own people for long. Not now, after attacking the Earthmen.

Old Reuel, Yelisen's father, walked slowly around to look at Daniels' face. He didn't like what he saw there. The old man saw the button for which Paul's foot kept reaching, and stepped on it for him.

The spy, whose gun had followed the old man with a quivering irritation, to drop him the instant he showed threat, relaxed a little. The gleaming barrel of the jeday dropped a hair. There were three doors in the big room, and one great window in the wall. Down over each opening plunged the heavy armor plate with a sudden harsh clanging. The spy whirled in complete confusion at the delayed reaction to the old man's movement. The opening through which the spy entered was now sheeted over with armor plate.

DANIELS laughed, and sat down, looking at the spy.

"Now what do you think will happen, Han? None of us can get out till that is opened from the outside. It won't do you any good to threaten us, we can't open it if we wanted to. You're caught."

The ugly death in that cruel weapon centered on Paul, the soft pink face hardened and paled. He seemed about to press the trigger, when Yelisen, her eyes grave and quiet and wholly controlled, moved her sleek body smoothly into the line of fire. She knew what that terrible weapon did to a human. She had seen the space legion casualties, the dreadful quivering rigidity of agony, the slow death creeping inward from

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the paralysis, the final convulsive spasm of agony that broke the bones of the back with the last terrible movements of unbearable pain.

The spy's eyes glittered on Yelisen's. He pressed the jeday against the swell of her breast, the weapon whirred, faint as a hissing snake.

Yelisen froze into that rigid convulsion of utter agony, known so well by the nurses who tried, always without success, to ease the hours of pain as a jeday casualty died. The spy caught Yelisen's body as she toppled toward him. He swung the weapon on the two men.

"That was but a slight charge, she will live if I am allowed to get her to Cayr. Nowhere else does the knowledge exist that can counteract the effect of the jeday. Now open the shutters quickly, before your guard comes and I am forced to kill you.

Old Reuel, without a glance at Daniels, touched the rosette on the wall plaque and the steel shutters rose again out of sight. Even as they clicked into place, the *jeday* swung on Daniels. He felt the sudden grasp of absolute agony, felt a winding sheet of flame wrap him, saw old Reuel topple to the floor.

In the herbarium, the spy placed a dull gray shadow cape over his burden and himself. As he stepped through the gap where he had removed a six-foot panel of glass, he became invisible, melting into the darkness of the garden. On the floor beside Daniels' desk lay two men, jerking in agony, who had for many years protected the Hai-han from themselves and from Earth.

FOR Yelisen, lying motionless, staring out of the little cabin flyer, there were only the bright, close orbs of the nine suns and their satellites, strung out into the long shape of the antelope's spiraling horn. The warm necklace of jewels strung against the black, made worse the stoic cold of the face of the Hai-han.

Finding the painful paralysis did not prevent her speech, Yelisen spoke from her silence suddenly, addressing the spy, where he sat at the controls just in front of her.

"Did you know, Han, how much more rapidly the Earthmen live than do we of the Horn worlds?"

The spy had not expected her to speak to him. He knew the pride of the Evra, and that, of the proud and the high, this woman was foremost. But he managed to make answer. "I have heard whispers the leader Masson was younger than you at the time of your marriage. Yet when he died, he was far older in appearance, as old as our own oldest. This strange thing was remarked by many. But I do not know, nor does any, the exact amount of the difference, there being no tables or data to go on. One knows the men of Earth are able to do more work in a day than an Evra or a Han. Even the powerful Ranig of the mountain clans cannot move about so rapidly and so busily

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all day long, without rest or cease. Aye, my lady, they live more rapidly. Is is natural to assume they die more frequently, too."

Yelisen pursued her point: "Did you know, spy, that Earth will come with war-fleets if I am not soon returned to Evard? It is not wise of your master to invoke the wrath of a people who have been so kindly and so prudent in the use of their power over us."

"Ah, you are so right, my lady. But Franel will not think you are right. And in Franel's hands are the strings to which my life must dance."

Yelisen smiled through her pain. "You have seen how easily they turn aside the mighty blows that misguided Lord of yours has struck at our home? They have not tried to send great rocks crashing upon the home of your people — your wives and children are safe from them."

The spy did not smile at Yelisen. He only shook his head foreboding-ly. "I have two wives and several children. If I did not obey, the Hai-han would take vengeance upon them. You did not know that?"

"Better to lose a few than to lose all, spy. If the Earthmen are pushed too far, they have a weapon that can wipe the lives of mankind from the whole face of a world. I have seen the pictures. My husband has tried very hard to keep such things away from our worlds, and now Franel, who is too stupid to know, is spilling the milk of kindness into the Earth-men's face."

The spy looked straight ahead. "It is the master's thought that if you are once married to him, all these possessions left you by your hus-band, as well as the support of the men of Earth, will be his."

Yelisen gave a bitter laugh. "I know his thought, but does he know mine? That is the point."

The spy resumed his wet, girlish smile. "I will be interested to learn, when he finds out, what the result will be. Very interested!"

Yelisen went on: "The women of the Han are taught to obey the men. Of the Evra, we are taught to have an opinion, to be equal in all things with men."

"Ah, my lady, women have always too many opinions. They run a man by the nose as it is. Do not tell me the Evra have even worse troubles with woman's will?"

Yelisen laughed again. This time her voice was not amused, however. "This leader of yours may learn much about women, yet."

The spy could not sit still. He turned to see her face, and then he exulted in spite of his iron control.

"It will be happy day for me when a woman twists that one's nose and makes him like it. That day, my lady, I will take service under Yeli-sen."

"That day will come, spy, and that day I will send you on an errand to Earth itself, to see the world where women work and study and are equal with men. Side by side they live the same—almost. And too, on Earth you

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will learn why it is not wise for the Hai-han to provoke the Earthmen of the Horn. For there is evil on Earth, they tell me, which our Earthmen have shielded away from us.

"Talk, talk, women do but talk of things they know not!"

"Now again you are a Han, instead of a human being. Fah, I will not speak with you again."

They both lapsed into silence for the rest of the voyage.

* * *

THE Han spy, whether by merciful intent or by accident, had given Daniels and the old man the same light paralysis charge from the *jeday*. The spy had lied about the need to go to Cayr for treatment, for both men were fully recovered in four days. Daniels set out at the head of a flight of six space fighters to find the camp of the Han leader. He had two main goals, to release Yelisen if possible, and to destroy the motivation of their attack at any cost. The future of the people of the Horn worlds depended upon keeping peace, giving no excuse for intervention by the larger interests.

The camp was not hard to find. The Han, in their work of pushing the asteroids into a course for Evard, had left a trail in space as broad as a highway. A trail of pebbles, litter and jet gases remained where the heavy Han craft had ganged up on the great rocks, clamped fast with magnetic grapples, and towed and pushed them in the direction of Evard.

The trail led to the dead planet called Hai-lan. Hai-lan, "land of death," so named because it was covered with the ruined cities and underground passages and tunnels of a vanished race. The planet was ringed with a belt of rubble, as well as a ring of pearly fluid. To Daniels' eye the rings told of the event that had turned the world into the "land of death." Some large body, a great meteor, must have approached very closely, been attracted into an orbit around the planet, and from the stress had broken up. Evidently the water of the world had been pulled up into space by the attraction of the meteor, as well as most of the air, and had trailed after the satellite as it took up a permanent orbit about Hai-lan. As the meteor broke up into fragments, the whole had formed a belt of water, rubble and the large rocks that Franel had been towing free and starting off on their voyage to Evard.

No one knew just what lay beneath the forgotten structures. Daniels could guess the Hai-han had been finding out in recent years. Daniels knew very little about the place, except that the air was breathable, if light, and that it was a dry, almost waterless planet. The catastrophe which had formed the rings had calcined the surfaces here and there into vast flat plains that glistened with a sheen like glass. Between these glistening plains were the chaotic fragments of mountains,

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jumbled blocks of granite, and here and there a hill upon which stood the mighty ruins of the work of intelligent beings long dead. What the planet might have been when it was alive, no one now living could say. It was in these ruins somewhere, or under them, the Han chief had made his headquarters, his base of operations.

Looking over the river of rocks and debris circling the planet in a vast ring, like the rings of Saturn made up of concentric colors due to the centrifugal forces separating materials of different mass — Daniels observed the great milk-silver inner ring, mused aloud into the intercom.

"I think the boys below could do with a drink of that, Mark."

His aide grunted. "Wouldn't be much of a trick, Paul. The instruments say it's heavily charged with negative ions. Set up a positive field below, and it will rain right down. The rate of fall could be controlled by varying the strength of the field, and the direction of fall by moving the field. We could furnish a deluge on any spot we preferred."

Daniels made his decision. "Peel off, Mark, and go tend to it. The base on Oaldak is only an hour away. They ought to have everything you'd need. I'll undertake to keep Mr. Franel and his boys on the ground. It would seem a better idea than getting shot up."

PLANING low over the desolate face of the dead, desert land, Paul recognized here and there the great openings of underground structures. In one of those the Hai-han had their hangars, their shops—there must be a wealth of machinery left in those warrens by the vanished race. It was pretty evident the Han had had access to machine shops as good as anything on Earth. Their construction of a fleet of ships in the short years it had taken them was a prodigious accomplishment for the race the Evra called "barbarian." They had solved the enigma of Earth's machinery far more rapidly than men of Earth would have done if the position had been reversed. Here was the secret, in those cities under the calcined rocks below.

Daniels spotted a suspiciously regular outline along the edges of a gleaming surface of stone. He led his flight of five across the space at two hundred feet. Yes, there were ships lined up in the shadows of the vast upheaved boulders, and there were a row of openings under the boulders leading downward. They circled the improvised landing field.

The Hai-han had a lot to learn about modern war. They had camouflaged the ships crudely. Gray tarps had been thrown over them, and the openings to the underground were covered nets. But it was a job that would have fooled no one. Paul triggered a burst of rockets into the row of ships, watched the explosions, looped up and over to see what came of it. Were they going to sit there and let him knock off the whole

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field?

From the north end of the field a rocket projector began to fire erratically, the air laced itself with smoke trails, rockets burst about the five craft. They broke up formation, peeled off right and left. Two of them dived headlong upon the rocket rifle. It fell silent. Nothing to worry about so far, mused Paul, pulling up for another pass.

Scurrying forms could be seen in increasing numbers, racing out of the cavern mouths, boarding the silently waiting ships. The five Earth ships screamed low over the swarming men at the ship's locks, rapid-fire explosive shells turning the whole area about the hangared craft into an inferno of flame and flying fragments.

As they pulled up over the south end of the field, assembling into a loose V preparatory to making another pass, Steve Carey, who had been trailing the five as rear guard, sighted a group of twenty or more ships coming in for a landing—or for an attack on themselves.

"Let's take them," shouted Daniels into the intercom, and headed toward the incoming ships. The five Earth craft swung with him, zoomed up and up, pivoted dizzily above the Han flight, dived into them. The flight parted right and left clumsily, and Steve turned the dive into a swoop up under the bellies of the right half of the formation. Ten rocket projectors poured flame in steady gouts as the flight hulled three of their enemy, sent five others limping off with damages. One after another the three pierced hulls exploded. Flames shot out of the ports as the Han warriors threw them open to dive to their deaths. It was that or burn to death.

"No chutes," Paul shouted into the intercom. "This warlord of theirs has a lot of care for his boys!"

Three passes over and under the now fleeing attackers, and they were finished. Paul and his four comrades were left alone in the sky, and down on the chaotic desert of the dead planet twenty smoking wrecks marked the Han attempt to drive them off.

THE Earthmen circled the Han flying field again, watching for an attempt to get the remaining craft into the air, strafing at every slightest movement. For two hours they patroled the field, circling wearily, waiting for word from Mark that the water project was completed. Then Steve spotted more Han ships, a big group of tiny specks on the horizon, and Paul, counting, wished heartily the rest of his men were present.

He had left the bulk of his forces busily repairing damages suffered in the Evard attacks. They were also hauling out ships long discarded, unused for years, some of them the first ships in which Masson had come to the Horn. When these were all ready for flight, Earth forces would have nearly a hundred makeshift

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battle craft—not good against a well equipped opponent, but good enough against the copied ships the Hai-han had built. Meanwhile, these five ships and Mark's absent fighter were all he had to fight with. The bulk of the trading ships were slow freighters, good only for hauling supplies, not for actual battle.

The approaching flight proved to be a group of over forty Han jets, of three different types, and Paul took his time, sizing them up, before he suggested taking any action against them. A dozen of them were copies of the Masson trading ship, a heavy cargo hull with too light a jet assembly for battle. Paul decided these were either full of supplies or were convoying warriors. A half-dozen of the lighter craft proved to be copies of the life-skiffs used by space liners, too lightly motored for maneuvers in battle. There were but a score of them fitted out as fighting hulls, Daniels saw, and decided to engage them. But before he could give an order, the enemy separated into three groups, the fighter craft dived on the waiting Earth ships.

Paul decided on flight, and shouted into the intercom: "Let's play follow the leader, Steve, and see what these boys can do!"

They turned tail, leading the Hai-han this way, that way, up down and across the sky in apparent frightened attempts to escape.

Still keeping a tight formation, Paul headed up and past the innermost of the planet's rings, headlong into the dangerous flow of speeding rocks that made up the outer circle of concentric belts of ring material.

This was the place their Lord Franel had acquired his rocks to tow toward Evard. Some of these pilots must be experienced with the conditions here. Paul meant to find out how good they were. He dodged in and out, leading them into narrow escape from collision with a vast rock fragment again and again—and hard on their tails came the now confident Han pilots, doing a lot better than he expected.

Paul saw that these boys were not the green pilots he had bested before, but men capable of nearly equal skill to his own, completely undaunted by the deadly proximity of the ring rocks. Far ahead Paul made out the bulk of a vast freight hull, and as he drew closer a sight of relief came from his lips. Mark had gotten into position with the work ship, and beneath the huge hull hung the copper cables of which he was forming the necessary field projector.

Paul shouted into his intercom: "Mark, can you hear me?"

"Go ahead, soldier, I'm listening," came Mark Vasso's voice. Paul could hear the clank of wrenches as he worked. "What gives?"

"I'm bringing a bunch of Han ships under you, Mark. If you can shoot some juice into that fishline, we might do them some good. But don't turn her on till we get past, you know why!"

As Paul's flight came close, he

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could see a half-dozen space suited figures scrambling into the big air-locks of the old freighter, slamming them shut. It looked as if they were almost ready to generate the powerful positive ionizing field which would bring the inner rings of circling water down upon the planet—if Mark was right in his position and the field was strong enough.

Paul led his own flight just above the vast stretch of gleaming copper cable, hoping that something would not go wrong with the plan. It was screwy to expect it to work—but still, it was worth trying. He had seen crazier stunts succeed.

As Paul's flight flashed past just above the cable, he yelled: "Let her go, we're on our way!"

But his plan nearly failed. The Hai-han pilots scented a trick in his proximity to the great bulk of the battered old work tub, veteran of nearly a century of space travel, used now only in an empty space where gravity wouldn't pull the old plates apart. The Han flight dived hard, down and down, to pass far beneath the suspicious ring of gleaming cable, hanging so artfully spread out in front of the old ship.

But Mark saw the maneuver, had been ready for it as he watched the dodging flight among the ring fragments. He plugged in the last connection, drove home the huge knife switch with a blow of the heel of his hand, and leaped to the controls of the old ship.

The response was a lot more instantaneous and complete than any of them bargained for. The stored negative charge on the ocean of circling water was vast beyond comprehension, and as the copper surged with power from the old generators, up from the ring leaped the most immense bolt of lightning ever witnessed by man. The breakers flew out over the whole ship, sparks leaped, crackling deafeningly. Mark staggered away from the controls half blinded and deafened as down through the center of his field coil, the great circle of cable, leaped a flame like the sword of a warring god. Due to Mark's timing, or to the metal of the Han ships, the vast sword of flame slashed at the Han flight of fighters like the stroke of a bolt from Zeus' own hand.

Space was filled with the explosion resulting from the sudden disintegration of the Han ships, and with the following flood of water, released from its age of circling by the attraction of Mark Vasso's ring of charged cable.

The water spouted downward in the path of the lightning bolt, washing space clean of the charred fragments of the Hai-han warriors, then poured down and down in a great twisted worm of titantic force upon the planet far below.

Paul's flight of five circled the titantic phenomenon warily, filled with awe at the fate of the Han pilots. Paul called over his intercom, "I'll go down and observe the point of impact, Mark. I think she's going

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to hit too far north, so when I give the word, move her south till I tell you to stop. I want that right on the Han camp. That ought to teach them!"

"Some spout, eh, man?" his phone shouted back at him. Mark's voice was elated and a little relieved to find himself still in one piece, it sounded. "It's a good thing the breakers cut the juice in time or that bolt would have incinerated yours truly instead of those Hai-han babies. You know, that was what I call a nice quick death, no pain, no worries—just blam, it's all over and no pieces."

"Just keep that old tea-pot spouting, Mark. I'll give you the dope down below . . . "

Paul let his ship drop in free fall. The other four fighters remained in position about the work ship, to repel possible attack. But all of them felt that if that bolt and this waterspout didn't overawe the Hai-han forces, nothing would.

* * *

TO the Hai-han, the battle in the skies seemed magic of a high order. The huge bulk of the freighter, its ancient vintage of a mysterious shape and design, the immense power crackling in man-made lightning, the vast lightning bolt that had heralded proceedings like the crack of doom itself, the strands of gleaming copper floating under the rings of Hai-han all combined to stupefy completely their already overburdened nerves. They had been fools to challenge the supremacy of the Earthmen, each of them privately decided.

Then, like the finger of an angry God, twisting down upon them came the great tube of water, a snake a half-mile across, a pouring, roaring torrent of falling force — twisting down and down in a vast spiral, the oceans of the dead planet returning again to their beds after so long exile. It was all too much. The barbarian minds, so proud of their mastery of the Earth machines and building techniques, suddenly reverted. They fell upon their knees and shouted aloud to their gods to save them.

Like an avenging Djinn, the whirling core of pure water descended, hit the planet about a mile north of the main camp of the Han. The flood spread out, began to flow in torrents southward, a river of tormented angry water reaching furiously for the Han base.

Paul, circling above the Han field, gave directional instructions to the ship above, and Mark joggled the force ring half a mile southward. The descending waterspout moved obediently to take up a permanent position in the north end of the great bowl of calcined rock. The field began to fill. What had seemed level ground, dry and bare for an age, now became the channeled bed of a river as the flood sought a path toward the lowest ground.

Han warriors began to pour from

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the mouths of the underground openings, without order, in blind panic, racing away upward, anywhere to get away from the avenging torrents. No matter where they turned they found water barring their path. The jumbled boulders and vast rock fragments walling in the field became covered with vainly scrambling figures.

Daniels signaled to Mark to shut off the flood, and set his ship down in the water. He taxied up to the entrance from which the Hai-han still struggled out, neck deep now in the violent flood pouring into the opening. Daniels sat, idly waiting until the flood had abated, subsided to a slow, waist-deep flow.

Somewhere in those warrens, perhaps, was Yelisen and Franel, if she had been brought here. If the leader had not yet reached the opening, they might at any moment come out right into his hands. One of the wading Han warriors came slowly up to him, and Daniels called in Evra, which many Han understood: "Where is your leader?"

Even as he asked, Daniels saw a familiar face peer at him from the dark shadow of the opening, then move back out of sight. He recognized the Han leader from the photo of him in the company files. Paul saw that he would have to go after him or flood him out, and he couldn't take the chance in case Yelisen was in there. He slipped a small rocket pistol into the holster under his arm. It was a hand weapon adaptation of the ancient bazooka, and packed an enormous wallop for short range work. In the holster at his side he carried the standard needle gun, firing the hollow needles of concentrated metrosol which knocked out a victim without killing him. The magazine was full, one thousand knockout punches on tap if needed.

The warrior he had spoken to stood in front of him, his mouth open still with that astonishment from the enormity of the Earthmen's attack. He was soaking wet and full of awed respect. Not waiting for his answer, Paul vaulted from his air lock into the receding water, splashed past him and into the opening where he had glimpsed the leader's face.

He meant to find that man, and extract from him two things; Yelisen, and a binding pledge to peace. He would never forgive himself if their little stunt of bringing the exiled oceans of a dead planet back to roost had cost him Yelisen.

Far in the shadows he made out the movement he knew must be Franel, plunging on into the depths, and Paul sloshed after him, only to lose sight of his quarry. He had turned off into one of the several low arched openings—but which? The waist deep water swirled about him as he stood there in indecision. A slight figure, wading noisily, came out of the shadows, stopped in surprise at sight of Paul. His hand went to the hilt of the ever-present *jeday*. At his side swung the inevitable Han short sword, relic of their ancestral

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cavalry traditions. He was of the same fresh pink skin and red-lipped youthfulness as the spy. The Hai-han were not so heavy-boned as Earthmen, but were slender and quick and graceful, inheritors of a war-like tradition which looked down on hand labor as menial. Paul knew that the real genius of the Han nation was not in this warrior class, but in the heavier and harder-muscled workers and mechanics and farmers. Paul felt that this class, if they retained leadership, would eventually lead the Han race to destruction.

The man half pulled the *jeday* from his belt, and Paul whipped his needle gun to a level with the man's eyes before the *jeday* cleared his belt. The warrior shoved the weapon back into place, smiled slightly, mockingly.

Paul's voice was angry: "Take me to your leader, youngster!" Paul's eyes were weary and bloodshot with recent strain, the gun in his hand waving slightly back and forth.

The man's voice was girlish, mocking, irritating as turpentine on Paul's raw nerves.

"You cannot enter the presence armed, intruder! First abandon arms."

Paul laughed, and bellowed in complete overwhelming anger. "Take me to Franel, or I'll blow you to bits. I've had about enough from you Han! Sons of death, is it? It'll be mermaids I'll make of the lot of you if you don't show some manners!"

Behind him came a silky, suave voice, in polished Evra phrases as perfect as Yelisen's. "You wish to see me, man of work?"

PAUL whirled. The Han leader had moved up behind him, carried the deadly *jeday* in his hand and could drop him if he wished. Paul did not move his hands. He spoke as calmly as he could, but his voice shook with anger still.

"Get Yelisen, Franel! Never mind bargaining. You are going with me to Evard. Once there, I've a few things to show you, then you'll sign a little agreement I mean to prepare. Now get going; bring Yelisen out of this. This place will be under water in a very short time."

The man laughed, a mocking sound that raised Daniels' blood pressure another notch. "Now that is comical, that request. Why should I? You are in here, the water has ceased to fall—it will not fall until we go out again. You are a very stupid workman."

Paul knew he was being insulted every time Franel called him a workman, for these Han warriors considered anyone who worked beneath them. He boiled over, the trigger finger of his gun hand twitched and the Han soldier dropped into the water, gurgling in the ugly spasms of the metrosol charge. His other hand swept in a sudden arc, driving a spray of water into Franel's smooth smiling face. Franel fired his wea-

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pon. The power spray of the *jedray* spurted into the water where Paul had stood as he dived sideways, shoved himself in a great splashing leap upon the Han leader. They both went down, completely under the muddy water, and when they emerged Paul's hands were locked around the Han's throat, their weapons were lost in the water. Paul drove a knee into the Han's stomach and the fight went out of him. Paul shook him like a terrier with a rag doll, roaring mad.

"Where is Yelisen, you louse? You've nearly ruined the Horn's chances, and hers too! Now where is she, before I knock your pumpkin head off?"

The Han leader pointed weakly with one lax hand. Paul lunged off through the water, dragging the half unconscious man afloat behind him.

Yelisen was still locked within one of the ancient chambers. The door was a grill of metal, open to the water. At sight of her, standing there with her hands twined about the metal bars, her eyes huge and frightened, her gown drenched and her hair awry, Paul swore.

"You lily-livered lizard, you were so anxious to get away from the water you couldn't spare time to unlock the woman you're supposed to love! Now unlock that door, or by the bright eyes of Beelzebub, one by one I'll break your bones until you do!"

Daniels tore the weakly proffered keys from the Prince's wet grasp, opened the door, dropped the sagging form of the Han leader as he lifted Yelisen into his arms.

Yelisen, her eyes wet with tears, sobbed a little, laughed, managed to say: "Paul, I had given up, it is like new life to see you! I didn't expect anything but death when the water came in."

A gurgle and a splash about their knees reminded Paul of the Prince. He reached down with one hand and retrieved the drowning man from under the water.

* * *

THEY came out into the awe-inspiring sunlight, the rings of water above Hai-lan forming an immense rainbow of beauty. Paul set the Han leader upon his feet, propped him against the ship while he helped Yelisen into it. As he pulled Franel roughly in, he shouted into his intercom: "Let her go, Mark. We're in the clear . . . "

The great spout came twisting down again, spiraling, beautiful in the sunlight as blown glass, smashing at last to a first impact only a half-mile away. The Han warriors, who had lowered themselves from their perches on the wilderness of rocks and boulders, again began a mad scramble for higher positions, and the ludicrous sight caused Yelisen to laugh until she suddenly realized that they would really drown. Then she turned her eyes on Paul. "You can't drown them, Paul, it

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just isn't your way! You can't drown them, that's impossible! I'll never believe it even if I see it!"

"Don't fret," Paul said in English, which only himself and Yelisen understood. "I just want to make sure they get plenty experienced in the horrors of warfare, modern style. Some will drown, but it's necessary to keep them mindful that future warlike inclinations are unwise. They've got a lesson to learn." Then he winked at Yelisen, and added in careful Evra, making sure the drooping Leader still sprawled on the floor at their feet would hear:

"I'll drown every man-jack of them if this leader of their doesn't give his parole to me."

The figure on the floor raised his head, then stood up suddenly as he saw the mighty spout of water spiraling down and heard the thunder of its fall so close. He stood for a second watching his men scramble and claw as they tried to climb higher on the sheer sides of the tumbled rocks, saw the bobbing heads of swimmers here and there trying to reach yet higher rocks, saw the vast flood of water rising, rising. His voice was shrill.

"Man from the stars, you cannot do this thing. It is murder!"

Paul laughed, slapped his palm on his leg.

"*You* could murder the people of the Evra, who had raised no hand to you in war. *You* could send your men to their deaths in craft just built, untried, green inexperienced pilots against seasoned veterans. *You* could send them to their death. Why should I not?"

The Lord Franel's voice was very low, very sorrowful and full of self-pity, as he said: "Salusen!" The Evra equivalent of "parole." It meant literally: "defeat," or "I consent to defeat."

As he gave the word, Paul spoke into the intercom: "Shut her off till the Han boys are out of danger, Mark. Keep her in position, then we'll finish the job later. I think this'll be quite a planet when she has her water back."

Mark bellowed a cheerful "Okay boss, see you in Evard." The twisting serpent of falling fluid was cut off at the top, narrowed, became a fine thread of diminishing brilliance in the sunshine, and finally disappeared. Yelisen sighed, placed her hand upon Paul's arm as he set the heater to ready the tubes for flight.

"What are you going to do now, Paul? You frighten me, you are so angry. I don't know what to expect!"

"I'm going to take this would-be general home and show him the news flashes of Earth's atom war. If that doesn't cure him, I am going to wring his neck with my bare hands. Why?"

"Oh." Yelisen settled back in her seat, smiled softly. Her voice was a faint whisper, barely audible. "And then, Paul? What then?"

"As if you didn't know, Yelisen. Do I have to show you?"

Yelisen was very grave, her hand on his arm trembled a little. "Yes,

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Paul, show me. I am á woman lacking in imagination."

Paul sighed, but glanced at the Han leader, biting his lips out the side port. "Into your acceleration chair, Han! We're taking off!" he bellowed, as if he had not heard Yelisen's soft voice offering him the ecstasy of her lips.

A second later the fighter jet shot into the sunlit skies, headed off under the rainbow rings toward distant Evard.

* * *

THE next day, Daniels sat at his desk in the house of Masson, going over reports. The teleplex warbled softly an ancient Evra melody, curiously plaintive fingers of song that twisted into the heart. The flowers in the herbarium filled the room with the scent of spring. Outside the Earthmen came and went busily, ships lifted from the far landing field on shafts of flame, new cargoes going to earth and other far places in touch with the great Masson trade routes.

Yelisen came in, long and sleek and wholly lovely. She bent over the chair and kissed Daniels on the ear. He stood up, made to take her in his arms. But she whirled away from him, laughing.

"Oh no, Paul Daniels, I will not let you make love to Yelisen. I am an old widow woman, and you are so young!"

Daniels stood waiting, and after a second she came back to him. He said: "Seriously, Yelisen, we ought to be married. The boy needs a father, this place needs a husband, not a hired hand. I love you as much as anyone could. Why not become my wife?"

She took his hand, pressed it to her cheek, and actually looked sorrowful. "Because, dense one, I love you too much. It must have been very painful to Henry that he should grow old while I remained young. Do you want to go through that, too? It is not fair to you!" Daniels bent and took a small red backed book from the desk drawer. He opened it to a certain passage he had marked. He handed it to her, indicating with his finger the place he wanted her to read.

"That is your husband's diary, and I know the passage by heart. Do you think I would go into it blind? Read it."

She took the book. The English script was hard for her to read; she spoke each syllable slowly, separated wrongly—but she read it, her hesitant voice thrilling him with its liquid tones.

"Today I am sixty-five, an old man. But it does not seem possible. With Yelisen as young as ever she was, I do not ever realize I am old if I avoid the mirrors. Never before was a man so fortunate as to have an unaging wife . . . "

"I just won't look into any mirrors," Paul said. "I think it'll be worth it."

THE END

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QUANDARY

By

George O. Neumann

BRICE stepped back, surveying the painting in mild disgust. He turned to his wife, his model, and said dispiritedly, "It's finished, Elna. You can relax now."

She drew her flowing robe closer to her body and walked to the easel. "Why it's quite good," she exclaimed, "the lavender skin tone really does something to it."

"Yes, I suppose it'll do. They'll buy it at any rate. But I'm so tired of doing imaginary ilustrations of people from other planets. Once — just once I'd like to see what they really look like!"

His wife surveyed the painting of the tall, lavender-skinned girl with long orange tresses stepping out of the space ship. It was the best that Brice had ever done, she thought. When it was published he was sure to receive bids from the other science fiction magazines.

Brice sat down on one of the couches and moodily stared at his latest work. Elna immediately went to his side and put her arm around him.

"Don't fret darling," she said soothingly. "You're the best illustrator in the business and someday your paintings will land in the National Museum of Art."

He smiled and squeezed her hand. Elna seemed to be the only tonic that worked for his tired nerves. If other critics were as easily pleased, he would be famous by now.

"Yes darling—the National Museum. But now your husband is a busy man. I've got to clean those brushes and begin some sketches for that story on Venus."

The wall phone rang. He answered it, listened to the excited voice on the other end and hung up quickly.

"Elna! Elna! Ian just called. There's a strange ship heading this way through space and he thinks it might land somewhere nearby. Get your hat and let's go!"

They stood near the edge of the open plain and watched the strange ship circle.

The huge ship braked, its turbine jets were cut off and it glided in for a landing. A port hatch slowly opened and a figure appeared. Brice watched, fascinated and then murmured, "So that's what an *Earthman* looks like!"

THE END

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The TCHEN-LAM'S

VENGEANCE

By Robert Bloch

There in the Gobi the miracle of transference of bodies took place; but the real horror came when it happened in an American beauty parlor.

NEVER mind how I got to Lhassa. I did a lot more than shaving my head, learning six dialects and studying up on Tantric Buddhism as formulated by Padmasam Ghava. I spent three years in planning, and before I reached the city of pantheons I had passed as a Buriat, a round-hatted Chakhar, a Khalka, and a half-dozen incarnations of disguise. I drank thick tea in a hundred *yurts* before I got into the particular temple I had my eye on. The lamas are wise and cruel and relentless, and they have spies everywhere.

But finally I succeeded, and then turned my three camels into the desert on the endless trek through the Gobi. The most evil city in the world lay behind me, and the malign sands stretched before me—the desert, staring up like a great yellow face.

But it was worth it.

I had stolen the Lotus of Lhassa. The Supreme Emerald, the sacred stone of Gautama, rested in my belt. It was worth a quarter of a million—and my life.

Now I must pass through the desert and reach the coast if I valued safety. I drove the camels on.

It wasn't so bad the first week. Exultation buoyed me up, triumph was a cloak to shield me from the scorching sun. But then loneliness came, and thirst, and exhaustion. I wandered through the eternal dust of a demon's graveyard.

I began imagining things.

The mountains were all around me, and they grinned against the horizon, their jagged edges like the teeth in the mouth of a mad dog. At dusk a wind would bay from the black throat of the night, and I could feel those teeth yawning for me.

But it was worse by day, when I trudged through a sea of ochre flame that was the desert, and the sun blazed down like a finger-ring stone on the hand of an angry god.

Sometimes the rocks were black dwarfs that danced around me; sometimes the dust was a yellow dragon that coiled across my path.

I slept under boulders white as the sun-bleached bones of giants, and I huddled in the Cyclopean ruins

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of cities dead five thousand years.

After a while there were no more cities nor boulders nor mountains, and nothing was left which I could compare to humanity. The buzzards had stopped following me, and the beetles were gone. I walked under a burning sun that filled the sky and hissed down in molten rays upon the empty, endless sand. Then I got that terrible feeling of *aloneness*. There was nothing in the world but torture of sun and sand, with me between. The sand burned my feet and the sun burned my head, and then little rays of fire lanced through my body, and I walked on and on and on.

My body was covered with horrible sores, and my blood was black as it ran from my nose and mouth. My feet were swollen into shapeless blobs of agony. The skin rolled from my face like mummy-flesh exposed to the outer air. My head was an iron bowl filled with the venomous stewing juice of fever.

But I still had the Lotus . . .

I didn't rave or curse or mumble or sing. It was worse than that. I didn't think about water, or food, or sleep. The expression on my face never altered. I just tottered on, like some ghastly marionette. When the camels blackened and died, I left them where they fell, without taking up the knapsack or water-skins. When I thought I was going to die I dropped in my tracks, but I always got up again.

This was it. This was what I had expected. And it was worth the horror. I had the Lotus. I'd make it.

The desert was a vast, lonely room I had to cross—a single great room a million miles long. I was all alone in that room, and I kept plodding.

THEN one day I sensed the presence of another in the room. It was just like that. If somebody comes into a room you know it, even if the room is a million miles long. Another had come in. Perhaps he was a hundred thousand miles away, but I felt him.

And I knew fear. From that moment on I didn't mind sun or fever or the cancer of weariness which gnawed at my heart. I had a greater dread.

The *tchen-lam.* The *tchen-lam* are the Guardians of the Lotus. They are the spies of the temples of Lhassa, and they are the most evil men in the world. They are the Hunters, and at the twilight Hour of Mutilation they set forth on missions of vengeance.

All Tibet fears the *tchen-lam,* the magic ones. They know the Black and the Red and the White Secret, and they control winds and water and desert sand. Offenders against the faith are marked for doom in the secret temples, and then the *tchen-lam* go forth to bring that doom.

If my theft had been discovered, and they were on my trail, I could never escape. This I knew, and that is why I was afraid.

The *tchen-lam* are cruel.

Khalka Mongols will hang you up

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by the nose on iron hooks, and tie weights to your legs. Chakhars are slightly more imaginative. They will stake you out under the desert sun, cut off your eyelids, and set beetles on you. The Torgots flay you alive and thrust you into a sack filled with wild dogs. The subtle Soyots may amputate your arms and legs, and then place you in a pit with the rats.

But the *tchen-lam* are worse.

I heard of a man who was captured for blasphemous profanation of a temple. There are over a hundred bones in the human body, and the *tchen-lam* broke every one, slowly, and kept him alive. Then he was skinned, and his bones were removed, one by one. He lived until he had nothing left but two ribs, a pelvis, and a spine. It took months.

This was only one of their punishments.

And the *tchen-lam* crept behind me as I fled.

At last one day fell, like a molten tear-drop from the eyes of agony. I had crouched in the sand all night, burrowed deep, and when I tried to rise with the coming of the sun I could not stir. I sensed the presence of the other close behind me, but I could not stir. Could not stir, even with the ghastly inspiration of approaching doom.

I lay there shuddering, and the presence stole closer, and then I felt it upon me hours later.

A shadow stained the searing sand. I rolled over and looked up into a yellow face.

I blinked. There was nothing else to do. The face bent closer. Thin lips nibbled at my ear and a voice rustled.

"You are the American?"

I tried to nod.

"I have been seeking you."

I blinked again.

"I have heard much of you and you are the man I want."

I couldn't move. The face smiled, and then the whispering came again.

"You must not die, you know."

There was enough left in me for irony. "Why not?" I gasped.

"Because you and I are going back to America to start a beauty parlor."

Because you and I are going back to America to start a beauty parlor.

Never in fact, fiction, or fancy were words as mad as these.

I had stolen the Lotus of Lhassa, I was pursued over a desert hell by the cruelest beings in the world, I lay dying of exhaustion, in the middle of the Gobi—and a yellow face bends over me and whispers, "You and I are going back to America to start a beauty parlor."

Of course I must be mad. I had to be. I began to laugh and laugh and laugh.

THE yellow-faced man thrust a jug of water into my mouth and stopped my laughter, and he stroked the papyrus of my forehead and he propped me up in his arms. I became sufficiently revived to gaze up into

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his skeletal visage. His head was like a rotten, wrinkled apricot, and only his eyes were alive. The man was further gone than myself, and I sensed that indomitable will alone kept him on his feet. Those eyes blazed at me more forcefully than the sun, and they filled me with a peculiar power. I stood up.

"Who are you?" I whispered. "A *tchen-lam?*"

He shook his head slowly. "No. I am called Dagur. I come from the Deccan, and my mission in Lhassa can be spoken of later. I heard of you there and followed you through the desert."

"Heard of me?" I gasped. "Then it was known —"

Again he shook his rotten, wrinkled head. "I gain my wisdom in stranger ways," he said. "But I know you are the man I am seeking — international adventurer, grave-robber, treasure-thief. I want to take you with me when we go to America and start a beauty parlor."

I was getting used to this by now, and didn't reel at the weird statement. But I was still afraid.

"The *tchen-lam,*" I muttered. "Did you see them?"

"One follows us now," answered Dagur, calmly. "He wants the Lotus of Lhassa, which you stole."

I sank to the ground again. "What shall we do?" I whispered.

"Wait for him, of course," answered Dagur. "And when he comes we will give him the Lotus."

"What?"

"It will be for the best. The *tchen-lam* cannot be avoided. He will seek you to the ends of the earth. We might as well face him here and strike a bargain."

"A bargain? But he'll kill me, I'll lose the jewel —"

"The Lotus of Lhassa cannot be profaned," Dagur answered. "It must not be taken by force, the priests believe. Therefore he will not kill you for it. It would be sacrilege. You must give it to him outright."

"It's worth a quarter-million," I protested. "I spent three years planning this, and I've gone through hell here on the desert. Why should I give it to him?"

"Because a quarter-million is nothing. Because it is a mite compared to the fortune you and I will make together—if we live. And because you'll die here on the desert with the jewel unless we bargain."

"What kind of bargain will you strike?"

"Listen. You are weak, dying. So am I. But the *tchen-lam* will be a strong man, with a body trained to withstand the rigors of the desert. So I will bargain with him in this wise—I shall take his body in exchange for the jewel and give him my body in return. Then we shall have strength enough, between us, to reach the coast."

"You're mad," I mumbled, but I thought *I* was. "You cannot exchange bodies with another."

"I am Dagur. I have studied in

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the secret places, and I have a magic. By concentration my astral can invade the body of another, and I can place men in new bodies at will, if they be submissive. Extended hynosis, your science calls it. So if the emissary from Lhassa agrees, so be it."

"You can change bodies," I repeated.

"Of course. That is how we will make our fortune," insisted Dagur.

I lay back for good. I knew I was delirious. There was no Dagur, no mad scheme. I was dying alone. No reality. There couldn't be anything so fantastic. And yet —

Far down the shimmering way I saw the figure approaching. It plodded leadenly, like a wound-up doll. I recognized the tall yellow hat, the great otter collar, the huge skirt. It was a *tchem-lam!*

THE figure headed straight for us, unerring and relentless. I made out the features; the ivory mask of cruelty in which emerald eyes were set.

But Dagur did not flinch. The man approached, never hastening. Dagur raised a hand in greeting.

"We will bargain," he said.

The *tchen-lam* turned his basilisk-gaze toward me and nodded. "It is the one," he said, in clipped English. "And you speak for him?"

"I do," Dagur replied.

"So. Your bargain?"

"He will give you the Lotus of Lhassa in exchange for your body."

I expected the Tibetan to strike Dagur dead. His expression didn't alter, but there was a heightening intensity in his stare.

"Think," argued Dagur. "You could follow him until he dies on the desert, this is true, and then take the jewel. But this way it is easier, simpler. You take the jewel, give your body, and use my weak form to return to Lhassa. Time counts; every moment the Lotus of Lhassa is away from its shrine is an affront in the eyes of the gods. Give your body and take the jewel."

"Thieves must be punished," said the *tchen-lam.* He said it softly, but I thought of my bones being broken and torn out, and trembled.

"Natural death is no punishment," insisted Dagur. "Perhaps there is another way."

"Yes, another way!" The Tibetan's voice trembled with exultation. "I shall accept, yes, I shall accept your offer. My brothers in Lhassa will think it a capital jest, a capital jest."

Dagur looked puzzled, and so did I. But my new friend persisted. "Very well, then. It is done. You must submit your will to mine. Then our spirits will mingle, and each seek the other's flesh. We will use the veritable Lotus of Lhassa for our focal point. Give it to me."

I gave him the jewel. The sparkling drop of emerald brilliance shone in the sunlight. The grotesque Hindu knelt, and the yellow monk knelt facing him. The jewel lay on the

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sand between. Both bowed their heads and stared.

And I lay there, racked with fever, dying in the desert as I watched two magicians, or two madmen, sealing an unholy bargain which was to decide my fate.

"Submit," whispered Dagur. "Your will is strong, friend, and you must submit to aid me." The *tchen-lam* nodded. Suddenly both men became motionless. Rigid as puppets, eyes closed, they knelt in the sand. The jewel flamed. Then both bodies shuddered.

This was horror from High Asia, I knew. I was either dying or crazy. But I stared as the men fell and writhed on the ground; stared as they opened their eyes and blinked, sat up.

"Done!" The high-pitched voice of the *tchen-lam* came from Dagur's withered throat.

"Yes, done," whispered Dagur—from the body of the *tchen-lam*. It was unbelievable, but unmistakable.

I was too weak, too sick, to realize the full import of what I had just seen; the substantiation of the East's oldest myth. Transference of souls, the original and most ancient of all beliefs, just accomplished before my fevered eyes.

"Now I am strong enough to reach the coast with my friend," announced Dagur, rising and shaking himself—for all the world like a poodle emerging from water. "And you, is your withered body capable of dragging itself back to Lhassa?"

The wrinkled face reared up and I got a shock as I saw the *tchen-lam's* blazing eyes. "It is my will, not my body, which shall take me," he announced. "But now, the bargain. Give me the jewel. No—you hand it to me." And he pointed at me.

I picked up the jewel dumbly and held it out to him. A claw grasped it.

"A bargain is a bargain," said the *tchen-lam,* gravely. "But I have also sworn to my brothers that you shall know our vengeance. No one, from the dawn of time, be he beggar or Khan, has ever escaped us once he is marked for doom."

"You cannot harm him," Dagur reminded. "Your promise."

"I know. But my personal vengeance shall overtake him just the same, though I shall never raise a hand to strike him. He shall suffer at my hands nonetheless, as was sworn. That is why I consented to the bargain, because I know I can make him suffer in spite of it. I am a *tchen-lam,* and the *tchen-lam* are the greatest wizards in all Asia." He held up the jewel, and his eyes blazed through its fire, mingled with it in an emerald haze. I stared, and cold crept up my spine. "The greatest wizards in all Asia," muttered the *tchen-lam.*

"The greatest fools in all Asia," hissed Dagur. I never even saw the knife flash down, but suddenly the Tibetan crumpled to the ground and lay still. Dagur rose, wiped the blade, and pocketed the jewel.

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"I am the greatest wizard," he laughed. "I have cheated him, gained life, and the Lotus of Lhassa is still ours."

"But you told me you couldn't—" I began.

"I did not dare say otherwise, or when our souls met and mingled he would have known the thought," Dagur replied. "But now we are free, and you shall have no curse on you. He is dead, though I still have his body. And we go to the coast, to make our fortunes in a beauty parlor."

AT that moment I myself crumpled. It had all been too much. Desert nightmare, ending in incredible horror. I went out, and stayed out. He must have carried me. I don't know. How he fed us, kept me alive, went on—these things I cannot say. I awoke weeks later in a Canton hospital. Dagur was beside me, and he thrust a fortune into my hands. He'd sold the jewel, of course.

We were rich, and I was going to get well. It was all over. Dagur was in the yellow body of a Tibetan monk, and I nearly went out again when I saw that horrid reminder of reality I longed to forget. But I was well, and rich.

Dagur smiled.

"Up in a week," he said. "Then we book passage to America. My entrance is all arranged, thanks to the money. We shall make fortunes."

"How? What?"

"Why, as I told you. We shall go to America and start a beauty parlor."

I was sick of mystery.

"Let's have it straight," I began, sitting up. "Who are you, and where did you hear of me?"

Dagur smiled. Or rather Dagur smiled with the face of the *tchen-lam*.

"I am Dagur, as I told you. I was born in India. My father was Rajput, exiled by the British Raj. He studied ceremonial magics in the temples. I grew up with priests. I learned many things — levitation, hypnotism, things Western science still calls magic. *Sakhyati*, the tree of teachings from which *Yogi* springs as the merest branch, I have mastered. One of the powers I gained is that of transferring bodies."

Now I've met *fakirs* before, and fanatics, and charlatans doing rope tricks. But I could not scoff at Dagur, because of what I'd seen in the desert. Because of what I saw now—Dagur's eyes in the hatefully yellow face of the *tchen-lam*. He was a wizard.

"I went to Lhassa on your errand," Dagur continued. "I too meant to have the Lotus for my own. I must have followed your trail, because when I camped I heard stories of a lone Khalka pilgrim, a Buriat wanderer, and a Chakhar. Each place saw only one man, never all three. Therefore I reasoned that someone was travelling in disguise. At first I meant to overtake you and kill you. Then, my friend, as time went

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on I began to marvel at your cleverness. When my idea came, I saw that you would make a living ally instead of a dead rival. So I allowed you to steal the Lotus and followed you into the desert. The rest you know."

"You saved my life," I mumbled.

"Nothing." Dagur raised a yellow claw of deprecation.

"But this mumbling about a beauty parlor?"

"Simple. In India I am a holy man, yes. I can perform small magics, I can steal. But I want my heritage. My father, the Rajput, once lived in palaces. I want those riches. I can never earn them by petty thievery. I cannot become wealthy exercising my powers for fools. But in America, with your aid—ah!"

"Beauty parlor?" I persisted.

"I have studied your Western culture, as you call it—a culture of decadence, a woman's civilization, founded on outward deception and falsehood. The beauty parlor is a symbol of occidental deceit; a mask of loveliness over rotten decay."

"The devil with your sophomore philosophy," I countered. "Facts."

"Here they are, then. Every year American women spend billions, yes, billions of dollars on beauty culture. They go to be massaged and marcelled and manicured, to be kneaded and sweated and pounded into youthfulness. Thousands of wealthy women spend fortunes endeavoring to recapture their lost charms. Do they succeed?"

"Well—no. I suppose not. But they still go, still pay."

"Exactly. And don't you think more of them would go, and pay greater sums if they did succeed, turning their ugly bodies into young, attractive forms once more?"

"Yes."

"That is where we come in, my friend. Oh, I could start out as a fortune-teller, a *swami*, a cult-leader. My knowledge would be of service there. But there isn't enough in it. I want riches, quickly. And I shall have them, making old women young again."

"But how? By giving them some of *yogi* treatment or exercise? Have you got a philtre, or a rejuvenating secret?"

Dagur smiled, and again that yellow face was creased.

"No. Simpler than that. You saw my secret on the desert. If the subjects be willing, I can hypnotize them and change bodies."

I sat bolt upright in bed.

"Yes, change bodies. Instead of pounding some foolish old woman into a tight corset and charging her exorbitant fees, I shall give her the real boon she craves—a young, fresh body of her own."

"How? With whom shall these old women exchange their worn-out frames? Where do the young women come from?"

Dagur's creased smile grew evilly insinuating.

"Come now, my friend; I picked you because you are cleverer than

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that. You are something of a rogue yourself, I have reason to believe. And surely the answer to the question is easy."

I almost sickened. "You mean we abduct young girls and force them into such an unholy exchange?" I asked.

"Force? No— I have told you I cannot force anyone into hypnotic surrender without their mental consent. But in beauty salons, there are machines, surely? For fixing the ladies' hair, perhaps? Metal clamps on the head, I believe."

"Yes."

"And in western scientific classrooms there are machines on which a subject gazes at lights or colored objects until his will surrenders."

"I guess so."

"We merely combine the two. Adjust the clamps on the two women. The young girl surrenders her will after a time; so does the unbeautiful lady. They fall asleep—quite sound asleep. Then I concentrate. Their astrals are pliant. The exchange is made, and it is done. Simple?"

"Fantastic!" I muttered. "We'll never get away with it!"

But we did.

THE last week in bed I spent in planning. We figured it all out. We had money enough to splurge at the start. Rent an exclusive salon. Advertise discreetly. Build up an atmosphere of scented refinement like an ordinary beauty and health parlor. Curious women would come. Then, after procuring the girls, the first experiment. If it succeeded, the news would spread like wildfire. We could charge ten, twenty, fifty thousand dollars for a genuine rejuvenation.

Of course, there would be difficulties. An old friend of mine, never mind his name, would handle the girl angle for me. That was no problem. But the difficulties lay in making the sudden change plausible.

Dagur and I worked out our scheme quite carefully.

Dagur was to be a Hindu. Of course his skin was yellow, but that wouldn't matter. All Orientals with "new" discoveries are Hindus as far as Americans are concerned. Dagur was to be a Hindu with a new "thought rejuvenation" process, supplemented by the use of "secret oils and formulas known to the *devi-dasi* of Hindu temples." The old come-on stuff. We'd get the women, give them a few preliminary treatments in the old style, make them think that oils and perfumes and exercises were aiding their rejuvenescence. Then we'd work up to the big moment; put them under a machine and go to work.

That's where the subtle part came in. It might be difficult for an old battle-axe to fall asleep under a dryer and wake up an hour later in an entirely new body. If she was a brunette and woke up with blonde hair it might be doubly hard to convince her. I had a secret hunch most of

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the old girls weren't so confident in their treatments anyway; just wanted to be flattered and pampered. Actual changes in their unlovely figures might shock rather than please them —unless it was worked properly.

Well, I figured out a way to work it properly. To begin with, we wouldn't exchange bodies with just any young and fairly pretty girl we might get hold of. During the preliminary treatments we'd study our case. Try to visualize what the middle-aged dowager looked like twenty years ago. Was her hair brown, or black, or red, or a certain shade of blondness? Was it straight or curly? How tall was she? What was her weight? The color of her eyes? Yes, and what kind of a voice did she have? Get all the actual details.

And then, go out and find the right young woman to fill the bill. Perhaps we couldn't always get an exact duplicate. But we could come close. Then we might do a little adjustment work; plastic surgery on the nose, for example. Removing a mole, or adding one as the case might be. Then our plan might well be foolproof.

"I've got it—the final touch!" I yelled, the last day. "We keep the old dames on the premises during their entire course of treatments and never show them a mirror for a week. Keep at them every day during the fake preliminary treatments, kidding them along that they're getting younger gradually. Psychological suggestion, that they are losing five years a day. Naturally, they can't see themselves. A little dope might do wonders, too. Lead them up to the final phase, effect the transfer, and there they are. Fully convinced. Young, beautiful, and satisfied. Why, it's a humanitarian business, Dagur! We'll really be doing a great good!"

Dagur smiled, and I didn't care for his wolfish leer. I knew that he was thinking of the young girls for whom we would *not* be doing good; kidnapping them, forcing them into old, withered bodies, and then disposing of them once and for all.

But why quibble? Thousands of girls disappear every year, and suffer worse fates. Perhaps. And at any rate, why bother? There was millions in this idea, millions.

There was. We sailed, made New York, established connections. It was all easy—and I could use ease after my gruelling experience in the land of nightmares.

No more *tchen-lam* to fear. No more desert. Sitting in a penthouse and calling up this party about the girls; renting an elegant suite of offices, arranging with soft-voiced secretaries about advertising and rates. It was a picnic.

Dagur wore a turban, and a satisfied smile. We were ready to open. I was surprised at the roguery rampant in fine professions; we hired some broken-down quacks who could spout about "hormone injections" and the "rejuvenatory function of glands" who lent excellent pseudo-scientific atmosphere.

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There was no hitch of any kind. Our first client was quite a wealthy woman—I shall not mention names, for she is still prominent. At this time, she was prominent only about the hips. A distinct matron type, on the verge of matriachry.

FOR the first time we put our scheme into operation. It clicked. We had no trouble getting data on her appearance in 1923. We decided that a reduction to the age of 28 would be spectacular enough without bringing too much suspicion and incredulity into play. We got our data, and I arranged for the right girl.

My party brought the girl over, and we kept her locked up in the special rooms downstairs. We didn't treat her badly; just held her. Meanwhile, the staff went to work on our client, planted the build-up. Finally the afternoon arrived and it was all up to Dagur. Sink or swim, success or failure—Dagur must make good his boast or we were lost.

We brought the bewildered, half-drugged old woman into the room of mirrors we'd chosen. Dagur made a very impressive speech—it was truly a masterpiece. I know, because I wrote it for him. She was credulous. She was more than willing to submit to a trance.

Dagur had her out in the chair in five minutes. Then we brought in the girl. She was hysterical, a little, but Dagur injected morphine and then got her under the dryer. I hadn't inspected the apparatus he used, but it was only a matter of moments after he snapped the switch before her eyes closed.

Dagur turned out the lights and only a flame behind the mirrors blazed up. His yellow eyes closed. He rocked back and forth. I sat quietly. The sleeping old face and the sleeping young face contorted in agony as though both women suffered nightmares.

I felt the silence, felt what stole through the silence. Waves beat down in darkness. I stared at Dagur's face, thought of the *tchen-lam,* his curse on me which would never be fulfilled. I shuddered. Perhaps we'd fail; that was the curse the monk had meant. I began to perspire. And still the three silent figures sat in darkness. Then the lights clicked up, Dagur opened his eyes wearily, clapped his hands. The two women stirred. I got the old one out of there, into the locked room adjoining. Then we went back. The young brunette was stretching herself lazily.

This was the moment. Suppose nothing had happened? Suppose it was the same girl, after all?

She spoke.

Then I knew. Even before Dagur handed her the mirror and she gasped in incredulous joy, I knew we had done it.

I went into the room where the trembling, half-crazed old woman lay; the kidnapped young woman who awoke bewildered in a strange body. I felt a certain pity for her,

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but then she was obviously suffering this way; so I did what had to be done.

Afterward I came out in time to hear our newly rejuvenated patient raving with joy. I saw her hand over the check. Fifteen thousand.

Right there I got clever on my own hook. I told Dagur about the restrictions on banking laws which applied to aliens. I deposited the money under my own name. All money would hereafter be deposited.

There was plenty of money. The woman went out. She told her story to her friends—but her new body fairly shrieked the news for her. We had a flood of clients.

We didn't take them all. It was too great a risk. A few each week, ones we could duplicate easily with young girls. Our fees rose and rose. In six months we cleared three hundred thousand, profit exclusively. There was never a hitch, never a bit of trouble.

So it was. Success at last, success with the maddest scheme of all. I should have been the happiest man in the world—but I wasn't.

No, my conscience didn't bother me. I've never had one, I suppose. I got qualms, occasionally, when I had to dispose of old bodies; but then it came to be a routine thing. Like changing a window display in a department store, and throwing out the old dummies.

I didn't have compunctions about how we got the girls, either. I'm no sentimentalist. But there were other things bothering me — more subtle disturbances.

They say the desert does something to you. Perhaps that was it. I'd been three years in the East on my mission. I'd gone to the most fearful city in the world and bearded the demons in their lair. I'd nearly died in the worst inferno on the face of the globe. It might have done something queer to my mind.

Because in the middle of the night I'd wake up and think about the *tchen-lam's* curse. Foolish? Of course; the man was dead.

But then again, he wasn't dead. Dagur's body was dead, and the *tchen-lam's* spirit. Still, the body of the *tchen-lam* lived, and I saw it every day, with Dagur's eyes peering out at me.

The modern beauty salon, the cooing women attendants, all served as a pitiful mask for secret sorcery; for the mysteries of High Asia. I walked in the Twentieth Century atmosphere of high-geared business, but I looked into the face of a Mongol priest who had cursed me. I beheld the most incredible of all magics—the transference of souls. And it got me.

I'd think more and more about Tibet; dream of the lame, goitred women in their brocaded shirts, of the green-coated Torgots, of the diseased beggars in the streets of Lhassa. That was it. I ran a beauty parlor, but I dreamed of filth, squalor, disease, vermin. The Tibetans are a filthy race, and I'd remember their

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pitted faces, their scrofulous bald heads. Looking into the yellow face of Dagur I saw horrid markings.

ONE day I read a squib in the paper. About the death of an antique merchant in Canton. I thought of the Lotus of Lhassa, and shuddered. Had the *tchen-lam* taken it back? If so, why didn't they learn where I had gone? Why hadn't they followed me to exact the vengeance the priest had sworn on me?

Perhaps they had followed me. Perhaps they were coming now. I got to sneaking into my apartment at night, peering behind me on the street, eyeing everyone who came into our reception room at the beauty salon.

But there was no one. There was only Dagur, with his hateful yellow face—the face of the man who cursed me; the man who was a member of the cruelest sect in the world.

When my fears about the *tchen-lam* coming after me abated, I began to center my hatred on Dagur and his face. I didn't like it, or him. We never quarreled openly; too busy making money, but I fancy he disliked me as much as I did him.

Now we rarely met save at the salon, when there was work to be done or planned. I couldn't stand that yellow face, reminding me of my ancient guilt and my prophesied doom. If it weren't for that I would have been able to forget; to think of myself merely as a successful business man. But the face haunted me.

Maybe I could get rid of it. Dagur was clever, I knew that. He was an evil man, and a wise one. He'd defied the masters of Asia. But in picking me for a partner he'd unwittingly acknowledged that I was his equal if not his peer.

I was his peer. The money was all in my name.

I thought about this a lot lately. I could get the money and get rid of the *tchen-lam's* face with one quick stroke—a stroke to Dagur's heart. Perhaps my friends who brought the women could arrange it. Perhaps I could do it myself.

No. Dagur was famous now, because of the business. His sudden disappearance would stir up trouble. But—if the business fell . . .

Four hundred thousand dollars was enough for me. Dagur wasn't needed any more.

I could wreck the business, perhaps, and expose Dagur. He'd take the rap. As a mere partner, not implicated in the actual transference, I'd be safe. And the money was mine.

Then I wouldn't see the *tchen-lam's* face, or worry about a ridiculous curse. Why did that savage's silly threat haunt me? He couldn't hurt me, dead, even though his body lived. He couldn't . . .

But he made me sweat at night in dreams. And I had to stop that.

Dagur stopped it for me. I guess I under-rated the wisdom of the East, which is indeed the wisdom of ageless serpents. *He* must have planned, too, and his mind was subtle. I nev-

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er suspected the trap.

One day he called me into conference.

WE met in the room where the soul-transference was effected. It was private there, and quiet. We sat down. Dagur began to talk to me about quitting the business.

"Oho," I thought. "He wants money."

But Dagur never mentioned money. He just talked on and on about how he was sick of the racket, and now that we were both wealthy we might retire. He talked like a friend, like a brother. He talked until it grew dark and the room became dim.

He snapped on the lights behind the mirrors and I saw his yellow face; the *tchen-lam's* face that I had grown to hate and fear. It unnerved me, that grim reminder of unbelievable days, but I could not help staring at it. Staring at Dagur's eyes in that yellow face; staring as he talked on and on in a gentle drone and his eyes got bigger, and I saw that face loom up. It came to me across a burning desert, that face stalked me over the Gobi once more. But I didn't resist. I was caught in the mirror light and the voice-drone and the staring eyes. I was lost in Dagur's eyes.

The face was big as the desert now. I was lost in the face. I was lost. The *tchen-lam* was all about me, and I couldn't resist. I felt myself sinking.

Myself. What was myself? A dark blur, a liquid blur that could flow. Flow out of my body, into that face. Flow out, because all my being was concentrated on that face. Flow out into mirror-gleam and voice-drone and yellow face. I was ooze in darkness, I was flowing, flowing . . .

Then the chuckling laughter woke me, shook me into sanity. I opened my eyes, shocked to realize they had been closed. Dagur was laughing at me. He snapped up the lights and he was laughing. Dagur was laughing.

No—*I* was laughing!

But how could I be? I was sitting here, and the laughter came from my *face* across the room.

Then I knew. Dagur had tricked me. Like he tricked the old women. He'd put me into a receptive state, subtly hypnotized me—and changed bodies. Changed bodies. The body he stole from the *tchen-lam* he now gave to me, and stole my own.

Dagur laughed. I could only tremble as he mocked.

"I know your mind, my friend. I know what you were planning for me. But I beat you to the draw, as you would say. The money is all in your name—well it is in *my* name, now. I am you. It was written from the first that this must happen, and you didn't know, of course."

I stood up. Or my body did. The *tchen-lam's* body. I couldn't think, or hear, or feel. I staggered to a mirror. I stared down at the lean, emaciated form. I stared into the hateful yellow face I feared and dreaded—the face that was now my own for

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all time.

I began to laugh, uncontrollably. Within a week, staring at the face, I should go completely mad. Was this the *tchen-lam's* vengeance?

"I shall leave you now," Dagur was saying. "Of course, there is nothing you can do. I am glad of your assistance. I thank you for the money, and for ridding me of a body I was beginning to dislike for certain obvious reasons. The Tibetans are so filthy, you know?"

What did he mean?

"Yes." Dagur was opening the door. "It is all in the stars, my friend. In giving you the body I am unwittingly carrying out the curse of the *tchen-lam,* I suppose. He is dead, but remember what he said about making you suffer by his own hands? It seemed impossible for him to fulfill that threat, but I fancy he has. Yes, you are going to suffer at his hands."

Dagur left. I was standing in the twilight, brain reeling. It was too sudden, too mad; the climax of a nightmare.

But the real climax was yet to come. "You will suffer at his hands," Dagur said. Filthy Tibetans? Glad to get rid of the *tchen-lam's* body? How could that body harm me when I was in it?

Then I glanced down at the strange yellow claws that were now my own and I understood everything, quite completely and quite horribly. I was going to suffer at the *tchen-lam's* hands, truly so. For I stared at those hands, and knew the truth, knew the dead man's vengeance.

I was in the body of the *tchen-lam.* And the *tchen-lam* had leprosy!

THE END

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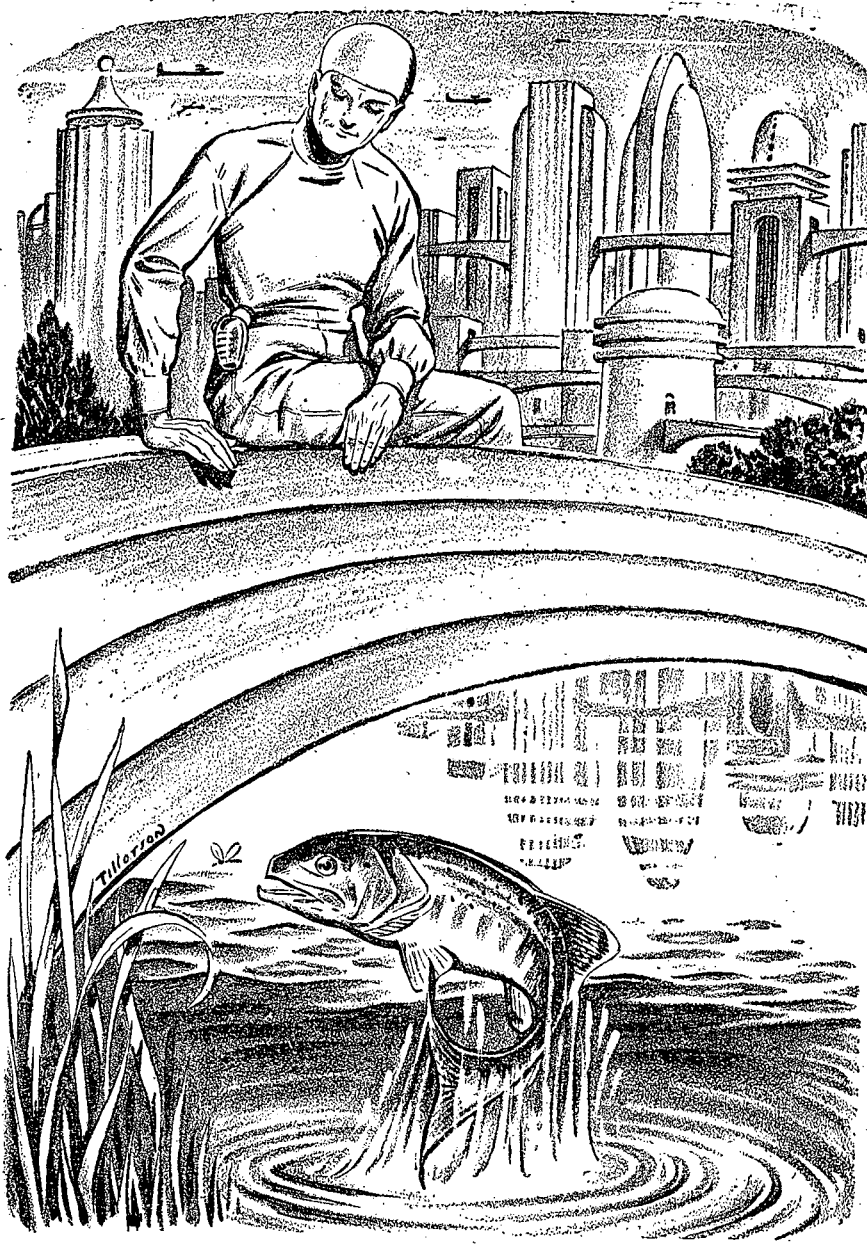

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THE BIG DEALER

By William C. Bailey

Could this crass commercialist be allowed to migrate to a planet where money did not exist? What could he do to damage "utopia?"

DANSY'S office, in spite of the foreignness of Medlarian architecture, gave Trent a feeling of relief. Bureaucrats on three planets, he reflected, all surrounded themselves with the same outward trappings of office. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that Dansy represented Government, whatever form it took on Medlar. His office was spacious and pleasantly cool. Light, springlike air moved the filmy drapes that shielded them from the sun.

Medlarian government was probably democratic at that, he decided. Certainly Seeley didn't seem to be in awe of it. He led with his right the moment they reached Dansy's littered desk.

"You know this man, don't you Dansy?" he demanded.

"Of course," Dansy said curtly. "And what are you doing here, Trent?" His lean, controlled face told nothing.

The Terrestrial grinned. Things seemed mixed up enough without any help from him. He jerked his head toward Seeley. "Ask him," he suggested, sitting down. Seeley lowered his bulk into the adjoining chair.

"Well?" Dansy asked irritatingly, stylus poised over a paper. "Come, come! What's this all about?"

Seeley's florid features paled. "What's the meaning of this reptilian deception?" he gritted.

A buzzer sounded softly. "One moment," Dansy said, leaning over to flick a switch. A small telescreen cleared and colored. Dansy exchanged a few words in a tongue foreign to Trent's experience, and switched it off with obvious irritation.

The bureaucrat turned back to Seeley, one eyebrow raised in supercilious question. "What was it, again?" he asked, reverting once again to Interstellar, the *lingua franca* of the Galaxy.

"You told the Council that Trent was from Bel'pris," Seeley burst out. "A deliberate deception!"

Dansy heaved a sigh. "Oh snakes," he said wearily. "Please, Seeley, we've asked you to do a job. Orient this man, won't you? And keep out of things that don't con-

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cern you. Over here, please," he called to the clerk who had half-entered the room, and then started to retreat as he saw that Dansy was engaged.

The bureaucrats took the papers from him, and busily scratched his signature to one after another, barely bothering to read them. He gave the impression the interview was over.

Seeley's rounded jowls reddened with the implied insult. "See here, Dansy," he growled. "You're not going to fob me off this way. Lizards! This man is not from Bel'pris!"

"Well?" Dansy asked coldly, without looking up from his letters.

"He's a Terrestrial!" Seeley cried. "A barbarian! And will prove nothing!" His heavy fist banged Dansy's desk in emphasis.

Dansy's unexpected smile cut with the numbing surprise of a carelessly handled razor. "He doesn't look like a barbarian," he said judiciously. "Do you feel like one, Trent?"

The Terrestrial laughed. "To tell the truth," he said. "I feel very much at home right this minute."

It was the bureaucrat's turn to pale. His tanned, leathery face grew sallow. "Don't overestimate your position," Dansy snapped, throwing his stylus down on top of the heap of papers. He called out loudly in his own tongue, and the clerk whisked in and out with the signed sheets. He turned back to Seeley. "Your attitude is perfectly silly. Don't you know why Bel'pris wanted to get rid of this man?"

"No."

"Well, go back a little. You recall the decision of the Galactic Union in the case of Terra. Even though the Terrestrials had not conquered space, the Union revealed itself in time to rescue the population from the oncoming nova. But do you recall the bizarre culture the Union found on Terra?" He turned his icy smile back to Trent. "Haven't you told him about it, Trent?" he asked.

The Terrestrial sank farther back into his seat. He might as well have been in the Proctor's office on Bel'pris, he reflected. Once again his economic motivations were being probed and dissected clinically, and being exhibited as an unbelievable anachronism.

"He never asked me," Trent said sullenly. They waited him out. "Oh, all right," he said. "We called it an enterprise economy. It was a deal where each guy did his best to get control of some of the instruments of production, and to cut off a slice for himself. We called it profit. Everybody made his living that way, or by getting payments for services from somebody who *was* making his living that way."

Seeley was startled. "But how could you?" he demanded. "I thought that Terra was considered civilized, in a sense. You can't possibly mean that a sort of economic warfare existed between all persons?"

Trent waved his hand wearily.

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"They didn't understand it on Bel'pris, either," he said sourly, as Dansy accepted another call on the visiphone. "But that's the way it was."

THROUGH with his call, Dansy was chuckling softly, his razor-sharp smile slicing Seeley apart. "A deception, eh?" he laughed. "Don't you think Trent's economic background is divergent enough to give us the acid test? Snakes! He'll be the perfect demonstration that divergent economic mores will not make immigrants dangerous to Medlar."

Seeley heaved to his feet. "You demagogue!" he snapped. His face quivered with ire. "You offend my intelligence. This unlettered savage, this barbaric neophyte, could not possibly test or prove anything. He will be completely lost, so amazed, so unable to understand what he sees on this planet that he might as well be blind, deaf and dumb!"

"Reptile," Dansy taunted him. "He was thrown off Bel'pris," he continued with acid relish. "Because he raised hob with their economic system. Oh, no, my isolationist friend, Trent is the perfect case. He will prove the point."

"Don't you think it's time," Trent demanded "that somebody gave me the pitch around here? What the hell is this all about?"

Seeley turned and stamped angrily from the office. "You sha'n't compromise my position, Dansy," he called over his shoulder. "By having me present when you feed this poor savage just enough information to keep him from starving to death while he is here! Orient him yourself!"

"Seeley! Lizards! Seeley, come back here!" Dansy roared. "Snakes!" he said to Trent. "You've ruined my whole morning. Sit still, will you, I've got to shuffle my appointments."

For the first time in his few conscious hours on Medlar, Trent was alone. It wasn't much different from Bel'pris, he told himself bitterly. Once again he was seated in the office of "authority." Once more he was the nub of a dispute. He wriggled and stretched to dispel the stiffness of his deep sleep. Funny, he reflected, he had never thought that Proctor would dare to deport him from Bel'pris. Illegal as all hell, he knew. They had stuck the needle in him without warning, right in the middle of one of those wild scraps over his conduct. Medlar could hardly be any worse than Bel'pris. Its climate, if one day was any test, was the sweetly odiferous balminess of June. Good thing, too, because the clothes they had given him would barely have made the last veil in the Dance of the Seven Veils.

Dansy strode nervously back into the office and resumed his seat at his desk. He sat for some time regarding Trent with a distinct expression of distaste.

"This was Seeley's job," he finally told Trent. "After all, he's a psychologist, and supposed to know how to handle these things. Well, here's

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the picture.

"You know you are in Medlar. You know why Bel-pris was so happy to offer you as our first immigrant when I got in touch with the Union on the subject."

"First immigrant?" Trent interrupted.

"Yes," Dansy replied, with an oddly smug smile. "You haven't seen Medlar yet. You will be astounded Trent, when you do. This planet is a veritable Utopia. We have an absolute unique economic set-up. Our forefathers felt that if we permitted immigration, we'd be swamped. They were afraid different economic backgrounds would tend to break down our carefully balanced productive culture. In the last hundred years or so, a good many of us have felt that was short-sighted, and that carefully limited immigration couldn't actually do any harm. The Council recently agreed to give it a trial. You're the result."

"What's so queer about your economic set-up?" Trent asked.

"It's not queer," Dansy said testily. "The proper perspective is to say that we reached economic maturity long ago, before any planet of which there is any record."

"Just words," Trent sneered sourly. "You're hiding the pea."

Dansy compressed his lips for a moment, as if repressing a sharp retort. His eyebrows flickered, the familiar sign of resignation to Trent's Terrestrial peculiarities.

"We are an ancient culture," Dansy told him. "Skilled in all mechanical things. Long ago we mastered the problem of scarcity by an organization of our planet's production on so thorough and scientific basis that all things which can be manufactured or grown are present in sufficient quantity to make them free goods. Just imagine, if you can, and you'll soon get a chance to see it all, a world consisting almost solely of engineers, operating the most fantastically automatic production machinery in the known Universe. Imagine a world where every article of food, clothing, social care, communication, transportation and basic accommodation is free for the asking. Any citizen can have as much of all of them as he wishes.

"Imagine a world where the productive segment of the population is less than ten percent, where thirty years of training is needed to take the simplest factory job, where ten years of work as an engineer is a full career, where the average citizen expects to live the next hundred years in graceful retirement.

"You notice our clothing, and how suited it is to this day. Thanks to our control over climate, each day is the same. Our whole planet is a gloriously landscaped park, bathed in perpetual Springtime!" He stopped, rapt with the vision he had conjured for himself.

TURNING back to Trent, he was all business again. "We have given you a full citizen's rights, ex-

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actly as if you had served your productive stint, and had retired. You can requisition all free goods. You will find our laws much like those of Bel'pris. In general, you'll stay out of trouble if you don't do anything that will harm others." He stopped and waited tensely for Trent's comment. It was not the wonderment he had expected.

"Are you ever full of crap," Trent said irritably. "No system could ever satisfy everybody's wants."

Dansy stifled his anger. "Pay attention!" he snapped at last. "I didn't say that. Only those things which can be *reproduced* are available in free supply. Naturally anything limited by its nature, such as works of art, real estate, antiques and so on, is not a free good."

"What the hell," Trent insisted. "Then your economical system revolves around them."

Dansy sniffed. "I suppose your unlettered mind would think so," he admitted loftily. "But it doesn't happen here. Our culture is what you would call non-pecuniary. We don't have the medium you and other planets call 'money.' Instead each citizen gets a fixed amount of consuming power for scarce goods at regular intervals. His consuming power is not transferable to other citizens. It's merely a bookkeeping idea, actually. He can only transfer his utils to the State. Thus, in spite of the fact that some things are in scarce supply, because we do not have 'money,' there is no 'trade' in them. No trade means no economic system. No economic system means that you can't disrupt our economic system, because there simply isn't any."

There was a little more of it, to the same effect. It all added up to the fact that Trent was stuck. He was considered retired. Work was out of the question. Worst of all, Dansy refused to discuss the chance of his going back to Bel'pris. "I know the place was a dump, Dansy," Trent protested pathetically. "But at least it had something in common with Earth, bless her vaporized soul."

"I can't understand you," Dansy said, plainly puzzled. "What more could anyone want than Medlar? But as for going back to Bel'pris, your so-called 'deals' there have made you most unwelcome. We can't discuss it."

Dansy was clearly becoming impatient to get rid of him. "Tell the guard at the gate you want an air-car," he told Trent. "Tell him you want to go to Dapreen. He'll dial it."

"Dapreen?"

"Yes. A little University town near here. I think you'll get along better with young people. And they may get something out of observing you, for that matter. If you want anything, call Central Depository on your visiphone."

"Suppose I don't get it."

"But you will. Snakes! Everybody does."

Trent shook his head angrily. "I mean, supposing it's a scarce item?"

"Oh. I should have told you. You'll

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get a thousand utils each yan, the way all citizens do. Your thumbprint will let you draw on your util credit at central. And your assets on Bel'pris have been converted into utils at an arbitrary rate. You have some consuming power to your credit."

"How arbitrary *was* that rate?" Trent asked, getting to his feet.

"Thirty credits to the util. Toads! Now *will* you go? I'm busy!"

TRENT went. The aircar summoned for him was completely automatic and pilotless. Once the guard had dialed his desired destination, it sealed itself and fled with a silent, enormous surge of power to the southeast. At cruising altitude Trent could clearly see that the countryside rolled away evenly to every horizon. Its clean greenness was cut up by homes or estates scattered rather uniformly, many of them near water. Twice they passed over what he took to be industrial installations, but of such enormous extent and perfection of planning that it took his breath away.

Trent got one quick look at Dapreen, his new home, as they rippled back through the sonic barrier to the accompaniment of a renewed and diminishing wail of slipstream. The University buildings were the main feature of the place. He guessed that his commodious apartment was actually located in one of the dormitories. It was almost deserted, for he discovered that he had arrived at the time of year when most students were spending a couple yan in travel in connection with their studies.

As a location, it had some benefits. Trent quickly found a professor of languages and pressed forward his study of Medlarian speech. There was, he soon discovered, little or nothing else for him to do. His quarters left nothing to be desired. He could cook his meals there, or he could have them sent in ready-cooked, or, if he preferred, could eat in the nearby inn. It made no difference which way he got his food. It cost him nothing. He just asked for what he wanted, and he got it. Because there was none other to be had, he retained Medlarian dress in spite of its briefness, and found that he could have as much of any article of attire as he wanted to carry away with him. It was all meaningless, of course. He could have a warehouse full of it and been no richer.

Worst of all, there seemed almost no games or amusements in which he could participate. The sports Medlarians enjoyed left him cold. Their books were too foreign to be enjoyable, for the struggle of translating the written word made reading a chore. The theatre on Medlar, he found, was something to participate in, not to observe. But in some ways the unkindest cut of all was the fishing.

Trent first noticed the fish while leaning idly on a bridge and looking moodily into the limpid water of a

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stream near his quarters. He had wandered dispiritedly away from his seemingly pointless studies of Medlarian speech. His walk appeared to get him nowhere. From one perfectly tended lawn, to a neatly kept spinney of trees, to a quiet pool in the willows, to the next lawn, it was all the same. There was no one about. The soft, balmy breeze and occasional twittering of birds were his only companions. "Like Sunday morning in the country," Trent remembered. "Everybody in church. The world at standstill." Nostalgia for an Earth that was no more welled up within him. He rested his elbows unthinkingly on the cool polish of the marble railing of a bridge.

For a while his unthinking eyes told him he was looking at a sunken log. Then its smooth undulations dispelled the thought.

"A big, lazy carp," he growled, but his voice broke into a shout as the finny creature exploded from the water in a dazzling leap to snare a large, birdlike insect common on Medlar.

"You're a game cookie!" Trent cried, running along the railing to catch another glimpse of the fish. He had instant thoughts of playing it on light tackle. "Baby, you weigh ten pounds, or I'm a Digger Indian," Trent mused. He retreated quickly to his apartment and dialed Central Depository on the visiphone.

It wasn't very happy. He finally got across to the operator what a fishing reel was, in spite of the language difficulty. But that was just the start of the disappointment. It seemed fishing for sport was all but unknown on Medlar. Yes, it had been done, it wasn't completely foreign to them, but the equipment was not in free supply. It seemed that you had to employ an artisan to make it for you.

A couple more calls established that the nearest qualified artisan was some hundreds of miles to the East. Even that wasn't so bad. An aircar responded quickly to Trent's summons, and spanned the distance at ultrasonic speed. That's where the truth came out.

THE artisan was located in a little shop that had, for all its functional architecture, a curiously Eighteenth Century look about it. Trent was not allowed in to see the artisan himself. His time, it developed, was too valuable for mere talk. An aproned apprentice, frighteningly impressed with the seriousness of it all, took his order in the front of the shop.

"Yes, I see what it is that you want," he said. "And I'm quite sure that Fenner can make it. I suppose that we should use noble alloys, to prevent corrosion."

"Yeah," Trent agreed, leaning on the counter. "Stainless steel, we used to use. Bronze is okay for the bushings, but there ought to be jewelled end plates." He sketched what he could remember of the workings of the brake on his casting reel. The

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apprentice twisted his neck as he tried to follow Trent's inexpert draughtmanship. "And a gimmick like that to prevent backlash," he concluded.

"All very clear," the other said, picking up the sketch and turning it so he could examine it right side up. "Wait a few moments. I will speak to the estimator."

It took a little while. Eventually the apprentice came back, several sheets of paper in his hand.

"Sit down," he invited, taking off his apron and walking out around the counter.

Trent frowned, but decided to make as much fuss over the matter as the apprentice wanted.

"We can give you rough sketches in about ten days," he told Trent. "In the meantime we can order in some of the special materials required. Fenner thinks the alloys you mention are not used here, but he feels sure one of our magnesium-iridium materials will meet your requirements. If not, the beryllium-platinum alloys will be suitable."

"Platinum," Trent grinned, remembering that he was living in an economy of plenty. "Sounds nice." He chuckled. "Diamonds for the end plates, I suppose?"

"Of course. Carbonado—black diamonds," the apprentice said absently. "I think we'll use that for bushing materials as well. We are not familiar with the bearing metal you spoke of."

"Okay, fine," Trent grinned. "How long will it take to make it?"

"Oh, just a couple days, when we get to it," was the answer. "That can't be until next yan, however."

"How many days?" Trent said suspiciously, still not familiar with Medlarian calendar practices.

"About forty," the other said. "And I have a preliminary estimate on cost. We can't guarantee it within less than ten per cent, however."

"Oh, close enough," Trent said amiably. "How much do you figure it will be?"

"About fifteen thousand utils," said the apprentice, consulting his papers. "A little higher than I thought at first."

Trent sat statue-still for a moment. "*How* much?" he demanded.

The apprentice raised his eyes. "Fifteen thousand," he repeated.

"Are you kidding?" Trent asked incredulously. "Why, that's a year's income. Fifteen yan to a year, aren't there?"

"Yes. But, snakes, man. It'll take two, perhaps three days to make it. An artisan's full time, do you understand?"

It took a little while to make it sink in. After a space Trent could begin to see it. In an economy where machines did everything, the output per worker was so immense that a man's time was almost infinitely valuable in any other occupation.

That ended the fishing expedition. Trent was so disgusted he revolted at the idea of fishing with a hand line. "The hell with it," he told him-

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self as his aircar fled through the pufly cumulus of perpetual springtime toward Dapreen.

THE visiphone in his apartment recorded that a call had come in during his absence. It was the first time in his several yan on the planet that anyone had seemed to care whether he lived or died. With some excitement he dialed the number on the call slip. The glowing whiteness of the screen colored softly and cleared to display the ruddy jowls of Seeley, the psychologist, in its frame. The background was a little out of focus, but Trent decided his caller was at home.

"Hello, citizen Trent," Seeley said sharply.

The greeting seemed a little odd to Trent. "Hi," he replied, still tingling with anticipation. He hoped for almost anything to break the boredom of his existence.

"Well, citizen," Seeley went on wth a heavy insistence not clear to Trent. "How do you find life in your new home?"

"I don't have to find it," Trent said sourly. "They cram it down my throat."

Seeley didn't find that funny. "I thought you would be on your way back to Bel'pris by this time," he declared, wagging his head decisively.

"Back!" Trent exclaimed. "Dansy wouldn't even talk about that. Swell chance I've got."

"Snakes!" Seeley swore. "If you mope around the way you've been, you're quite right. You'll rot before you ever get back."

"Snakes, yourself," Trent snarled. "If you're so damned sure I can go back, how come you waited so long to call me?"

Seeley's fat lips sneered at him. "I overrated your intelligence. It hardly seemed to me that anyone with your economic background would need any coaching. But as long as you stay a tame little savage, and don't make Dansy any trouble, of course he'll keep you here. You're playing right into his hand."

"And what the hell would you do, if you're so smart?" Trent yelled at him. "I'm hamstrung at every turning!"

Seeley shook his head pityingly. "If you haven't got the sense to see that your only chance to get back lies in upsetting Dansy's predictions of your ability to harm us, I can't see how you ever fared very well in the economic society you told us you were born to. Or have you no understanding of politics whatsoever?"

The screen went blank.

But not Trent. He lit up like a spectacular fireworks display. "Of course," he told himself, leaping to his feet. "What a jackass!" He strode rapidly back and forth in his apartment, letting the full impact of Seeley's idea penetrate. He knew what was in the back of the other's mind. Medlarians were conditioned by their long environment against

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silly use of the productive machinery. But he wasn't! "Just how silly can you get?" he wondered. He made a brave try at it.

The operator at Central Depository didn't get it straight at first.

"Yeah, I really mean it," Trent said, shoving the grin from his face. "Big thing back home on Earth, diamonds. I've always wanted to have my fill of them, and now's the time, I guess."

"Would you please repeat your order," the operator said, frowning.

"Sure," said Trent, all willingness. "I want some blue-white diamonds. Nice big ones, say about forty or fifty grams apiece." He grinned wryly, remembering that there were five carats to the gram. He was merely asking for stones of 200 to 250 carats each.

"Now I'd like those brilliant cut," Trent went on, as if he were ordering pork chops. "And as close to identical as possible."

There was a little trouble over how much a gram was, which Trent straightened out by reference to the weight of a known volume of water. That part was all right.

"Now, how many did you say you wanted?" the operator went on.

"Oh, I guess a metric ton would do for a starter," Trent told her breezily. "That would be twenty thousand stones. How soon can you send them over?"

She would have to call him back on that. It took quite a while. The chief operator was on the screen when it rang the next time.

"Your order for diamonds," she began.

"Oh, swell," Trent gushed. "Are they ready?"

"Hardly," the chief operator sniffed. "Am I correct that I am speaking to Trent, the Terrestrial immigrant?"

"Sure thing, kid," Trent grinned.

"I see. Will you please get in touch with Dansy at Administration?"

"Why, all right, if you say so," Trent agreed. "But let's not get off the subject. How about those rocks? I'm sitting over here pining my little heart out for them. Can they get here tomorrow?"

"Dansy can help you," she said, ending the conversation.

TRENT waited until the next morning, and went to Administration himself, thinking that he would rather take on Dansy's cool shrewdness face to face than over the visiphone.

The bureaucrat broke away from a meeting to speak to him in the foyer outside his office. Balmy air sighed through the open windows, rippling their filmy garments.

"What is it, Trent," he asked impatiently.

"I'm having a little trouble getting delivery of free goods," Trent told him reproachfully, hooking his haunch on the corner of a desk. "The chief operator at Dapreen told me to see you about it."

"Toad!" he snapped. "She told

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you to *call* me. Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Still, you're a public servant," Trent reminded him. "Let's step into your office for a couple minutes and hash this out. I seem to be getting off on the wrong foot. I don't want to make any trouble for you people."

Dansy's narrow eyes popped open at that. "Don't be ridiculous," he said a little shrilly. "You can't make any trouble for us. Oh, all right," he gave up. "Come on in. Snakes!" Trent stood up winked at Dansy's clerk and followed the Medlarian into his office.

His desk was still piled high with the paraphernalia of bureaucracy. Trent eased himself into a chair beside the desk. "I ordered some diamonds" he began.

"I heard" Dansy said wearily. "Lizards! Do they have to bother me with every little decision?" He buried his narrow forehead in his hand for a moment.

"Trent" he said at last. He sounded sick.

"Yes?"

"About those diamonds."

"What about them?"

"You have a real use for them, of course?"

"Does it matter?"

He looked up. He was beginning to *look* sick, too, Trent decided with an inward grin. "No, I guess not. You still want them"

"Dansy, of course I do. I pant for them!"

"I was afraid of that. Well, you shall have them."

It was Trent's turn to feel sick. "What?" he said weakly.

Dansy began to grin thinly. "Oh, I said you shall have them. Can't you get it through your head that our plenty is to all intents and purposes infinite? I can't honestly think you decided on this silliness yourself, or you would have gotten around to it a good deal quicker. Still, you shall have them."

Trent winced at the accuracy of the lean bureaucrat's guess, but did his best not to give Seeley away. Friends were too few on Medlar!

He tried to put a good face on it. "Swell, Dansy," he said, as happily as he could. "It'd be nice to get them tomorrow."

"Yes, wouldn't it?" Dansy agreed. "Unfortunately, we have never found a way to speed the methane bomb process. I understand it will take about two years to grow crystals of that size. We'll set up the gem cutting machinery in the meantime, so that cutting will only take a few hours. Please make arrangements to store the gems when you get them, eh, Trent?" He raised his tired eyes again.

The Terrestrial sat perfectly still. "Two years," he finally said.

"About."

"Um. Say, Dansy, I've had a change of heart," Trent told him rising dispiritedly to his feet. "Just skip the whole thing."

"Oh, no," Dansy insisted. "Not at

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all. Please. It's no trouble."

"Never mind," Trent said bitterly, dragging his feet toward the door. "You damned politician!" he snarled.

Dansy laughed hollowly behind his back.

Riding back to Dapreen Trent thought of a few choice things to tell Seeley about his hot idea. He dialed his number the moment he was back in his apartment. The psychologist answered promptly.

"Hello, dad," Trent greeted him sourly as soon as his solid features swam pinkly out of the milkiness of the screen.

"Well?" Seeley demanded.

"You struck out," Trent told him acridly, relating what had happened in Dansy's office.

Seeley raked out the names of a few more reptiles in the Medlarian version of profanity. "Toads!" he consoled savagely. "What are you going to do?"

"Listen to my hair grow, I guess. For Pete's sake, I can't even go fishing."

"I don't understand your reference," Seeley replied, squashing his eyebrows down in a heavy frown. "What is 'fishing'?"

Trent described the sport. "But, as I live and breathe, some joker named Fenner tells me it'll cost me fifteen thousand utils to have a reel made. Did you ever hear anything like that? Fifteen thousand utils!"

"Ah, Fenner," Seeley replied thoughtfully. "A highly skilled artisan. Yes, it would cost that much. But see here, Trent, in other times the sport was practiced. I feel sure you will be able to find the necessary equipment."

"Central Depository couldn't help me," Trent reminded him.

"I was thinking of that," Seeley replied. "Why not insert an announcement in the visicast? Indicate you are willing to trade something of value for a reel."

There was a long moment of silence. Trent could feel a knot of tension bind within him. "I guess I don't understand, Seeley," he said cautiously, half fearful that what he hoped was not really true. "What would I say?"

"Why, something like this: 'I wish to exchange with someone for a fishing reel and would appreciate hearing what any present owners consider would be a fair exchange.' You might draw a little sketch, so that the viewers will have no doubt what you have in mind."

Trent kept his face stiff. "I didn't know this sort of thing went on," he said.

"Oh, it's not frequent," Seeley agreed. "Almost anything can be secured from Central, but antiquarians and collectors sometimes resort to these exchanges. Is it clear now?"

"Yes, I guess so," Trent assured him. "I'll try it."

"I hope you are successful," Seeley told him, with the first show of friendly emotion Trent had seen on Medlar. "You certainly can't have much of an existence the way things

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are now. It would be pleasant if you could enjoy a sport with which you are familiar."

"It sure would," Trent said softly, and switched off the 'phone. "It sure would, Seeley," he went on to the blank screen. "But I'll bet you'd never guess the sport I have in mind. Oh, baby!"

FOR many minutes Trent sat in rapt concentration. The revelation that simple barter occasionally took place on Medlar completely changed things. Barter, exchange, the buying and selling of the market place, that was something he knew the way he knew the roof of his mouth. After all, hadn't he been a stock-broker before the threat of old Sol's explosion had forced Earth's population to flee in the ships of the Galactic Union?

It made a big difference. It might even make the difference of a trip back to Bel'pris. Seeley hadn't been wrong about one thing, he knew. The only way he would ever get back there would be by making so much trouble that Dansy would have to agree that immigration was a mistake, and send him back. That would take some doing.

He decided he might as well start the ball rolling with the fishing reel. If it worked with that, it would work with anything.

Planet-wide coverage on the visicast required only a call to Central. The half-minute announcement was illustrated by a drawing of the equipment needed "to sport for fish."

Less than ten minutes after his announcement had been broadcast all over the planet, Trent was electrified by the soft signal of his visiphone. He jumped to touch the "accept" stud. The full color screen lit milkily, colored and discolored a Medlarian apparently seated in his study or den, and who held in his hand what was unmistakably a casting reel.

"Bingo!" Trent hollored.

"I beg your pardon?" the image said.

"That's it," Trent told him. "That's what I'm after. What do you want for it?"

"A ticket to the quarter-finals at Loom."

"Sold!" Trent cried excitedly, his speculative instincts rushing to the fore. He remembered to jot down the call number of the other's 'phone before the image faded from the screen. He dialed Seeley in a frenzy of excitement.

The psychologist marked his recognition of the caller by a heavy, pouting frown. "So," he said to Trent. "It's the fisherman."

"Hey, Pop," Trent crowed happily. "I've bought myself into a jam. What are the quarter-finals at Loom?"

"That's what he wanted?"

"Yeah. What is it?"

Seeley waved a meaty hand. "Our traditional sport. The eight ranking teams meet in an elimination contest

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at Loom each year. The ancient stadium holds but 60,000. Apparently the owner of the fishing equipment wants an extra ticket."

"Well," Trent insisted. "How do I scrape one up?"

"You mean you don't have one?"

"Of course not," Trent snapped impatiently. "How . . . "

"But how could you accept his offer?" Seeley demanded gruffly. "That was a deception, Trent. You must call him back at once."

"Oh, for Pete's sake," Trent protested. "I told him I'd get him a ticket, and I will. I'll take my chances on what it costs me."

"I don't understand your attitude," Seeley said severely.

"Does it matter?" Trent groaned. "How do you ordinarily get a ticket?" he insisted.

"Surrender utils to Central Depository."

"Why doesn't this guy do that?"

"The games are sold out. They have been for six yan."

"Oh," said Trent, deflated for a minute. "Okay, dad, I got it." He broke the connection.

That meant a second "advertisement." He got a number of responses from people willing to exchange a ticket to the games at Loom for scarce antiques. The best deal he could make, in terms of utils, was with a woman who wanted an addition to her collection of china. The piece she wanted was available at Central and cost Trent 70 utils. With the ticket, he swapped for the reel.

At his request both the holder of the ticket and the owner of the reel had sent their wares to him by aircab, rather than by post. Holding the reel in his hands, Trent began to realize that in fact he was looking at a ticket to Bel'pris. With the cost of advertising nil, and with transportation and communication free, he saw that he could conduct a planet-wide operation in bartering at little or no cost to himself. Medlarians, he knew instinctively, were the world's worst traders, having little or no contact with the idea of bargaining and haggling over chattels. He knew he could make a killing.

He was so certain that his trading would quickly mushroom to the point where Dansy would have to put a stop to it, that he made no effort to put the thing on a formal basis. For a while he specialized in old china, then tapestries seemed to have a good currency. But that had its vogue and he switched to old books, documents and autographs. The collector instinct was, to his surprise, not as well developed as he would have thought in a world where so few things were scarce. Even so, by judicious swaps, he had accumulated within a few yan scarce goods worth, at Central Depository rates, at least 100,000 utils. His apartment at Dapreen was completely jammed with cases and cartons, and it became as much a problem to keep track of what he owned, and to dig it out of the pile, as anything else.

But then Trent realized that his

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hoard really could be considered "capital," and that he could use some of his stock of scarce goods as inducement to other citizens to assist him. The first free good to become pressed for supply because of his activities was visicast time. But additional wave lengths were assigned and the volume of business continued to grow. Central gave him more floor space when at last he had completely outgrown his quarters. At such a pace the whole planet could not help but be aware of his activities. Trent had definitely become a significant factor in Medlarian life.

Dansy could not long delay a call under such circumstances. Trent looked forward to that meeting with relish. He had the knife in deep already. Now he had but to twist it, and back to Bel'pris he'd go!

Dansy's message was curt. It was an out-and-out order to come to his office.

THINGS were really hopping at the bureaucrat's office. His desk was an apparently hopeless jumble of papers, half of which looked as though they had been thrown down in anger. Dansy was on the visiphone when Trent was ushered in, facing a purpling image in the screen. Dansy shouted a savage final phrase, full of reptiles, at the screen, and broke the connection with a smash of his hand. He turned back to Trent, glowering darkly.

It wasn't until then that the Terrestrial saw Seeley. The psychologist was nursing a fat, vindictive smile. There was no doubt harsh words had been exchanged before Trent got there. He flashed Trent a glance of recognition, and immediately returned his gaze to feast on Dansy's discomfiture.

"You!" Dansy barked in Interstellar. "Sit down! Squirming snakes! And you get out!" he bawled in Medlarian to his clerk, who had just come back into the room. All three watched the minion scuttle out. "And stay out!" Dansy yelled at the closed door.

The visiphone buzzed insistently. "And no more calls!" Dansy bellowed at the top of his lungs, not bothering with the communicator to his outer office. The buzzing stopped abruptly. It was all music to Trent's ears. He could feel his belly warm with anticipation. It was going to be one red hot session!

"Now, in the name of seven creaking turtles," Dansy demanded. "Let's get this thing straightened out. What about it, Seeley?"

"What about it?" the psychologist echoed indignantly. "See here, Dansy, you called this meeting."

"Only in the sense that somebody had to put a stop to your wild bellowings," the bureaucrat snapped sharply. "Well, tell Trent, and let's get it over! What a bore you people are!" He propped his forehead wearily with his hand. Trent felt a momentary misgiving. Dansy seemed to be shielding a grin. It didn't fit.

Seeley bridled a moment. "Very

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well," he said stiffly. "It's this ridiculous hawking of wares that you are dinning in all our ears. 'Trent and Company will exchange this for that!' Snakes! We've all had enough of it! You're disrupting our whole life!"

"Tell him the rest," Dansy urged, his face half-hidden behind his hand. "You know, the despicable barterer part."

Seeley flashed him an angry glare. "Yes," he said. "You are that. A haggler!"

Dansy broke into hearty laughter. "Seeley," he told the other. "As a psychologist, you are a fraud. Can't you see those are not terms of reproach to this specimen?" He turned to Trent. "Allow me to make up for those wretched epithets," he said with mock courtesy. "You fair trader. You maker of good bargains." He laughed again.

"You are surprised?" he demanded. "No, don't bother to answer. See here, Seeley, we're more than satisfied that all who trade with Trent feel they get the better of the bargain. After all, the exchanges were voluntary, weren't they?"

"Lizards!" Seeley fairly screeched. "What has that got to do with it?"

Trent felt the situation was getting out of hand. It was high time to stir the pot once more. "Say, I'm glad to hear you think so," he told Dansy. "We're running out of space down there again. I'll need your help to take over the rest of my building."

"Certainly," Dansy grinned. "Anything at all. Fine. Glad to help you. As a matter of fact, we've been considering asking you to join the Administration. Your operation would be a real adjunct to Central's clumsy methods."

TRENT saw his whole world collapsing about him. He only vaguely heard the rest of it, but he knew he had refused Dansy's suggestion that he join the Administration. Dansy's reply had merely been to tell the both of them to get out of his office, and a reptile-laden request to Seeley to stop making a fuss over every little thing.

He found his way out to a waiting aircab with feet that seemed to wend their own defeated way. He saw it now. Dansy could not admit his mistake without prejudicing the Administration. As long as the thing was not clearly insupportable, he'd let it go on. After all, Trent's activities were a drop in the bucket in the whole scene on Medlar. New, yes, but not overly significant.

Before he had entered the cab, Seeley stamped out of the building and strode heavily across the flower-bordered greensward toward him. They exchanged bitter glances of defeat.

"May I ride back with you?" Seeley asked.

"To Dapreen?"

"Yes. Do you mind?"

"Oh, no. Come along."

Seeley heaved himself into the cab. Trent dialed their destination and

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they surged smoothly into the air, accelerating powerfully. The tortured shriek of slipstream vanished abruptly as they passed through the sonic barrier with an uneasy shudder. The acceleration persisted for perhaps another thirty seconds, until they reached cruising speed. Something like fifteen hundred miles an hour, Earth style, Trent knew.

In the quiet of trans-sonic speed, Seeley broke his silence.

"That was a perfect turtle of a trick Dansy played on us," he said, more thoughtful than bitter.

"I forgot," Trent admitted.

"Forgot what?"

"Forgot that the absence of an economic system doesn't have a damned thing to do with whether you can have a political system. You guys act just like the rest of the Galaxy when it gets to politics."

"You mean we should have expected this from Dansy?"

"Sure. He's got too many chips riding on me. He can't quit now. Every time he seems to lose, he just doubles the stakes and lets it ride."

Seeley swore a couple reptiles. "It galls me to admit Dansy was right," he said.

Trent flashed him a glance of inquiry. "About what?"

"That you could not actually upset us economically. And I know you've tried. I honestly can't imagine a creature with more obnoxious motivations than yours. I doubt one could exist. Really, there are so many of us who wish you could find a way to get yourself deported!"

He was obviously in earnest, and his remarks so plainly not motivated by any dislike of Trent, that the Terrestrial was forced to laugh. "Do I really affect you that way, Seeley?" he chuckled.

"Snakes, yes!" he exclaimed. "I'm sure you know there is nothing personal about my feeling, Trent. In spite of your behavior, I honestly like you. Even Dansy, I am convinced, is repelled by your haggling antics." He glanced in wry amusement at the Terrestrial. "But even the ultimate haggler is powerless in a community devoid of economic motives."

"Don't be silly," Trent said absently.

"What do you mean?"

"There isn't any such. You guys all have economic motives. It's just that the mechanics aren't there. No money."

"No, no," Seeley told him didactically. "You're wrong. We really *have* no economic motives." He seemed proud of it. "How can we?" he enlarged. "In this perfectly organized world of plenty, where every normal desire is immediately capable of satisfaction? Trent, don't you recognize Utopia when you see it? There *can* be no economic motives in Utopia!"

Trent regarded him for a moment of silence. "Tell me something, Seeley," he asked. "You have a thousand utils coming to your credit next yan, right?"

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"Of course. Everyone does."

"Would you mind if I had Dansy arrange for you to get that credit a year from now, rather than next yan? In other words, do you have any objection to waiting a year for next yan's credit?"

"Certainly I do," Seeley replied.

"Why?"

"Why?"

"Yeah. Why do you care whether you get the credit next yan or a year from now?"

Seeley was flustered. "Don't be silly," he sputtered. "Why should I want to wait a year?"

"That isn't the question," Trent pursued. "Why should you care if you have to?"

"You're being ridiculous," Seeley said pompously. The rapid deceleration of the cab, and prompt reappearance of the scream of slipstream as they reentered the sonic range stopped further conversation.

Trent got out when they touched down at Dapreen. Seeley leaned forward fatly in his seat to bid his adieu. "I may be going back to Bel'pris after all," he told the psychologist. "You've just convinced me it can be done. I've been asleep at the switch."

"I sincerely hope you do get deported," Seeley said without animosity. "But this last set-to with Dansy has persuaded me you never shall. Trent, think what you're up against. It is not enough that you are trapped on a world devoid of an economic system, without even the medium you call money. Nor enough that its inhabitants are not governed by the drives that it is your custom to employ in your activities. No Much worse. The political situation, with Dansy and the Administration committed to the stand that your activities can *not* be harmful, makes it hopeless for you to try any farther. Come, my Terrestrial friend, admit it. There is everything that is beautiful and peaceful here. I realize we have all wronged you in thinking that you were no more than a barbarian. Surely your hoard of scarce goods will permit you to acquire a country home. Settle near me. Join our relaxing social life. You are butting your head against a stone wall."

"Thanks, Seeley," Trent said in all sincerity. "You are very kind. But this place is just plain prison to me, no matter what it is to you. Sure, I could go fishing for the next fifty years, but I've got an idea your fish are so well trained that they wouldn't put up any fight. Nothing is any fight around here, except bucking Dansy and trying to get back to Bel'pris. I'm going to make a career of it. One more try, anyway. This time, I think I'll get that crafty snake."

"I wish you well," Seeley said.

Trent stepped back, watched the cab seal itself, rise in a quick, neck-creaking spiral and hurtle at an inhuman pace to the West.

SLOWLY he walked across the University common, past wildly

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blooming beds of iris and tulips, past meticulously landscaped pools, wreathed in dwarf willows. The soft breeze sighed sadly through their pliant osiers. Carefully he ran the scheme over once again in his mind. It was the tickets to the games at Loom that would do the trick.

The games for which he had temporarily held a ticket had already been played. But in a few days Central Depository would put on sale tickets for the next year's games. Four quarter-finals, two semi-finals and the finals, Trent remembered. Sixty thousand tickets. That should do it, he decided.

Walking slowly back to his cluttered apartment, he resolved to call Dansy that afternoon. He got the bureaucrat with little delay.

"You made a suggestion today," Trent reminded him.

"Yes?"

"Something about my joining the Administration."

"You are interested after all?" Dansy inquired, a tiny frown of displeasure forming on his dark features.

"Perhaps. I was only thinking, if I were to do that, I'd need quite a little equipment. Say forty or fifty visiphones, and a batch of that electronic filing equipment I saw in your outer office. And some more space."

"Probably," Dansy conceded cautiously.

"I take it we could get it if we needed it?"

"Certainly." The frown was deepening.

"Good," Trent said briskly. "I'll order what I need today. If I have any trouble getting immediate shipment, I'll refer Central to you. All right?"

Dansy wiped his palms on his brief tunic. He considered his reply carefully. "Perhaps we should make our arrangements a little more formal before you expand," he said at last.

"What arrangements?" Trent wanted to know.

"About your joining the Administration. We'd expect to have control over your operations, of course."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," said Trent. "I'd like to continue on my own. I was just anxious about the equipment. But if it's available, of course, I wouldn't like to have any trouble getting it."

"Snakes!" Dansy snapped. "Now, see here. I replied as I did with the thought in mind you'd be joining us."

"What difference does that make?" Trent asked blandly. "It's available. Make damned sure I get it, Dansy. Seeley would give you a hard time if he thought you were putting obstacles in my way."

He broke the connection to save himself Dansy's wrath.

Trent and Company were back in business. In their new quarters Trent had set up fifty visiphones, each manned by a citizen willing to give some of his spare time in exchange for some part of Trent's hoard of scarce goods. The electronic files oc-

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cupied the upper floor, and were vacant except for entries reflecting his remaining inventory of scarce goods.

The first advertisement had the character of all the others. Trent and Company offered to exchange scarce articles for tickets to the games at Loom. The Terrestrial knew that his every action was closely followed by Dansy. The first sign was the initial offering price for the tickets by Central Depository. Realizing that Trent's offer would increase the demand, Central's price was fifty percent higher than the preceding year. Quarter-finals sold for thirty utils, the semi-finals for sixty and finals for ninety.

In spite of the higher price, they were taken up all over the planet as quickly as in other years. Of the 420,000 ticket holders, Trent and Company had soon received inquiries from nearly half. Then it was time, Trent knew, to get out the second advertisement. Visicasts carried several times each day the reverse announcement that Trent and Company were offering tickets to the games at Loom in exchange for scarce commodities.

With the electronic files to keep the work running smoothly, the operation was a dream. The office acted more as a clearing house than anything else. Only a small part of the goods traded for tickets, one way or the other, were actually brought to Dapreen. The files kept track of their location, and deliveries were made by aircab. Trent restricted his own activities to careful control of the "prices" that Trent and Company bid and asked for scarce goods. For their internal bookkeeping purposes, they were expressed in utils, but Trent was careful to avoid engaging in actual competition with Central Depository by enforcing the rule that all exchanges were goods for tickets or tickets for goods. His fifty "employees," intelligent Medlarians as they were, with careful bargaining rules to follow, were able to handle the actual detail of trading.

THE first tip-off that the explosion point had been reached came when Seeley himself called by visiphone and insisted on talking to Trent personally about a trade. The Terrestrial broke his rule of never handling a transaction himself.

"Sorry to bother you," Seeley said from the screen. "But I felt that I knew you well enough to ask for your personal attention."

"Sure, sure," Trent told him. Seeley did not seem particularly excited. Perhaps amused was the word. His thick lips twitched in the beginning of a smile.

"I have an unusual problem," he confessed. "I own a Tolset crystal goblet. Properly, I should have a pair of them. I'm thinking of exchanging for an additional one, or getting rid of the one I have. It will depend on what I can get in exchange, or what I will have to give up for another." He smiled happily.

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"By fortunate coincidence," he went on. "I have a ticket to the finals at Loom. Now, I wonder, what can you do for me?"

"You old son of a gun," Trent grinned. "Just like that, eh?"

Seeley's smile was innocuous. "I beg your pardon?" he said.

"Sure. Skip it," Trent replied. "Well, Seeley, no use beating about the bush with you. Wait a minute till I get the quotations." He dialed the proper code on the electronic file. He glanced at the little visiplate and saw the buying and selling prices quoted on the goblet.

"Central has that goblet. They want 104 for it."

"Yes?"

"Well, to be frank, we're offering 101 for that goblet. That is to say, scarce goods including a ticket to the games valued at not more than 101 by Central."

"That's three per cent less than Central's price," Seeley figured.

"Yes. Now, the other way. We have a Tolset goblet, too. You can have it for scarce goods including a ticket to the games valued at not less than 107 by Central. Or, figuring on your ticket, which Central values at 90, we'll give you scarce goods valued by Central at not more than 87.3 for it."

"Um." Seeley figured. "You want three per cent more than Central's price for another goblet. And you offer three per cent less than Central's price for a ticket, is that it?"

"You can figure it that way," Trent told him.

"That's a reptile of a thing to do, Trent," Seeley said.

"Cute, isn't it?" Trent replied. "Any law against it?"

"There soon will be," Seeley promised. "If Dansy has any sense. My apologies, my mercantile friend!" The image faded.

They didn't give Trent long to think about it. Dansy's summons was peremptory. Get to his office, and get there fast!

Trent was late, by design. His wager that Seeley would be there had been shrewdly made. The Medlarians had been together just long enough to get purple-faced with rage, but not long enough to come to blows, Trent decided on first glance.

Dansy's office was in a ferment. The visiphone buzzed every few seconds, and his staff were scurrying in and out for brief whispered conferences.

"Hi, kids," Trent greeted the others breezily, sitting down without invitation. "Been chewing the fat? Or each other's ears?"

Both Medlarians exploded with rage.

"Something . . . " Trent tried to begin.

"Shut up! Both of you!" Dansy ordered. He swung back angrily to the psychologist. "We will *not* let you capitalize on this thing!" Trent could see a difference in Dansy. This was no pretense of rage and annoyance, as had been the previous session. Dansy was mad clear through.

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And worried, too, Trent guessed. The visiphone buzzed.

"What now?" Dansy snapped at the image in the screen.

"Is he there yet?" Trent heard the speaker say.

"Yes! And for snake's sake, let me handle him!" He swung back to Seeley, and Trent realized with a sickening drop in his stomach that Dansy had referred to *Seeley*, not to Trent, as the one who had to be handled. It was starting off all wrong again!

"If you think you can make public your conversation with Trent," Dansy stormed at Seeley.

"You've been eavesdropping!" Trent interrupted reproachfully.

"Of course!" Dansy snapped at him. "A conspiracy . . . "

"Libel!" Seeley bellowed.

"Suffering lizards," Dansy groaned wearily. "Do you think we needed that, Seeley? Our auditors have gone all over his records."

"My records?" Trent demanded incredulously. "How could you? The staff is on duty around the clock."

"Your files are electronic," Dansy said, as if that explained everything.

"So?"

"We tapped your circuits and read them," he said testily.

"And you discovered?" Seeley asked.

Trent laughed. "They discovered my personal holdings of scarce goods have increased three million utils in four yan."

"So fast?" Seeley murmured.

"Well, this time it has to stop," he told Dansy. "Unless you're foolish enough to let him continue until the games are played."

Trent didn't bother to answer. Dansy had looked *that* far ahead. "Don't be an utter salamander!" the latter said. "He'll start all over with tickets for the following games!"

"Silly boy!" Trent taunted him.

"What?" The two Medlarians were looking at him in obvious puzzlement.

"I can expand right now. Surely Central will take orders for tickets. I'll deal in futures!"

"No," Dansy said finally. "This time you *are* joining the Administration."

"But I don't want to," Trent protested.

"And you don't have to." Seeley told him. "This is intimidation, Dansy. You can't bottle this man up to protect your insane policy of immigation. Trent is proving my point to the hilt. Do you think he is unique? Or that there are no other economic problems that other classes of economic mores won't introduce? Either he keeps his freedom to act or we rule out immigration. That's my position!"

"Reptiles!" Dansy snapped. "Who cares about your position? It's what *Trent* wants that counts."

"I've already told you what I want," the Terrestrial protested.

"But did you think ahead?" Dansy demanded. "You can't overlook the fact that your eventual return

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to Bel'pris depends on your successful economic orientation here. You know your Proctor wouldn't want you within ten light years of Bel'pris if he thought your stay in this moneyless world hadn't changed your outlook."

Trent laughed at him. "If that's your ace, Dansy," he chuckled. "You played it too damned late in the game." He gave way to laughter again.

"What do you mean?" the bureaucrat demanded, ridges of doubt furrowing his brow.

"You wouldn't even discuss my return to Bel'pris before. I decided to settle down here. I like it. Why should I want to go back? I never had it so good. And anyway, in a few more yan I'll be holding so heavy you could never arrange transfer of my assets to Bel'pris."

"Primordial reptiles!" Dansy gasped softly. "Trent! I never thought of that! All right. Trent, you go back today!"

"No!" Trent shouted. "I insist on my rights! I'm a citizen! I . . . "

He never saw the minion who plunged the deep sleep needle into his shoulder. He had a momentary feeling of triumph as he felt the rigor steal over him.

TRENT was conscious of no perceptible time gap as he awoke. He squinted his eyes against the first dazzling moment, and centered his spinning senses on his last recollectable thoughts. Yes, as he had hoped, he was back on Bel'pris. His stabilizing vision recognized the Proctor's stern frown across the table. Better yet, Dansy was seated beside him, still dressed in his brief Medlarian attire. The darkness under his eyes told that he had not been long out of his deep sleep, either.

He wriggled erect.

"Well," Dansy said bitterly. "You're back, Trent."

Trent cleared his throat, hoarse from disuse during the deep sleep of the interstellar voyage. "I'm not on Medlar, anyway," he observed. "But I'm not so sure I'm back on Bel'pris. Eh, Proctor?" he asked the Bel'prisian official.

The Proctor growled deep in his chest.

"Why do you say that?" Dansy asked cautiously.

"You wouldn't be here if it weren't to make a deal for Bel'pris to take me back. And the Proctor is scared silly I'll make a shambles here again."

Their silence was confirmation of his guess.

"It's okay," he told the Proctor. "I'm going to retire anyway. No more big deals to drive you crazy."

"Nice if you'd do it," the Proctor growled. "But why should I think you will?"

"Oh, simple. Dansy's going to buy me out on Medlar and transfer my assets here. How does that sound to you, Dansy?"

"Salamanders!" he swore. "You

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have a price, of course?"

"Why, yes," Trent smiled. "I was thinking that . . . ."

"Forget it!" Dansy snapped, leaning tensely across the table.

"What?"

"I said to forget it. We'll talk about nothing until you tell me how you did it."

"Did what?" Trent asked.

"Oh, all right," Dansy said impatiently. "We know what you were doing. But why did it work? How could Trent and Company charge one hundred and three per cent of original util cost for what it sold and yet only bid ninety-seven percent of that price for the same article when it was buying? How could it get takers both ways? What was unique about tickets to the games?"

"Nothing at all," Trent told him. "It would have worked with anything of a fungible nature. You guys were just getting a good quantitative look at the relative value of liquidity, of being able to convert your assets into liquid form. Your economic motives were enough like the rest of the Galaxy to make you prefer present to future consumption. In case you're interested, we poor unlettered Terrestrials used to call it the short term rate of interest."

Dansy thought for a while. "I see it now," he admitted. "Sweet, suffering lizards! Then there's no end to it. You could go right back and start all over, regardless what price Central put on tickets to the games."

"Sure. So you'd better buy me out and get rid of me. What's it worth?"

"Name a price," Danny said.

"Well, say ten million utils."

"What?"

"What the hell," Trent said magnimaniously. "Ten million with what I've got. I'll surrender the scarce goods owned by Trent and Company and retire, all for ten million."

"But *ten million!*" Dansy gasped. "You have barely three million."

"Don't be dense," Trent snapped. "After all, you have to buy my future profits, too."

"Snakes!"

"Cheap at the price," Trent urged.

"Ten million utils," the Proctor mused. "Let's see, we transferred your credits to Medlar at thirty to the util. That would give you three hundred million credits, eh?"

"Um," Trent gloated, basking like a cat in the thought of it.

"Well," agreed the Proctor. "That ought to keep you out of trouble. We'll take you back on that deal."

"Lizards, man," Dansy protested. "We'll have the reptile of a time arranging that kind of transfer."

Trent stood up. You kids rassle that out," he said agreeably. "I take it I'm free to go my own sweet wealthy way?" he asked the Proctor.

"I guess you are," he admitted, a little gloomily.

Trent laughed again. "Cheer up, pop," he advised the Proctor. "I won't make you any trouble from now on. One really big deal in a lifetime is enough even for a Terrestrial!"

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I FLEW IN A FLYING SAUCER

(*Conclusion*)

By Capt. A. V. G.

The giant space ship engulfed the Project Saucer investigator, and bore him on the strangest flight of his career — to a moon that was invisible !

(*Summary of Part* 1)

(*Author's Note: This story is part fiction. It is to be regarded as nothing else. However, the factual portions are a combination of personal experience by the author, and of the personal experiences of others who have viewed flying saucers. These factual portions of the story are disguised only in the names of the persons involved, including myself. The actual incorporation of these facts into a fiction story has been done by Ray Palmer, whose file on flying saucers is not exceeded anywhere in the world, except perhaps, by the files of Project Saucer at Wright Field in Ohio, and the files in the Pentagon. Let the reader judge for himself what his attitude toward this story should be. It is presented purely in an effort to entertain, but by its very foundation, much of it should prove thought-provoking.— A.V.G.*)

I *HAD just landed my plane when the emergency flare announced a pilot in distress. But it was not a flare; it was a brilliant blue-white disk, high above the clouds, at least* 40,000 *feet up. Barney, the tower operator, was getting strange static on his radio. The disk above was gigantic, rivaling the moon in apparent size, directly above the city skyline to the west. It was traveling at least* 800 *miles per hour. All at once it turned on edge and shot up into the stratosphere, disappearing many miles up.*

The radio was screaming at us; lieutenant Archibald was coming in for a dead-stick landing. As he came in, he told us how he'd also seen the giant disk; but now, he said, a tiny one, not more than 30 *inches in diameter, was chasing him. Suddenly it went straight up into space.*

Archie crashed his plane, washing

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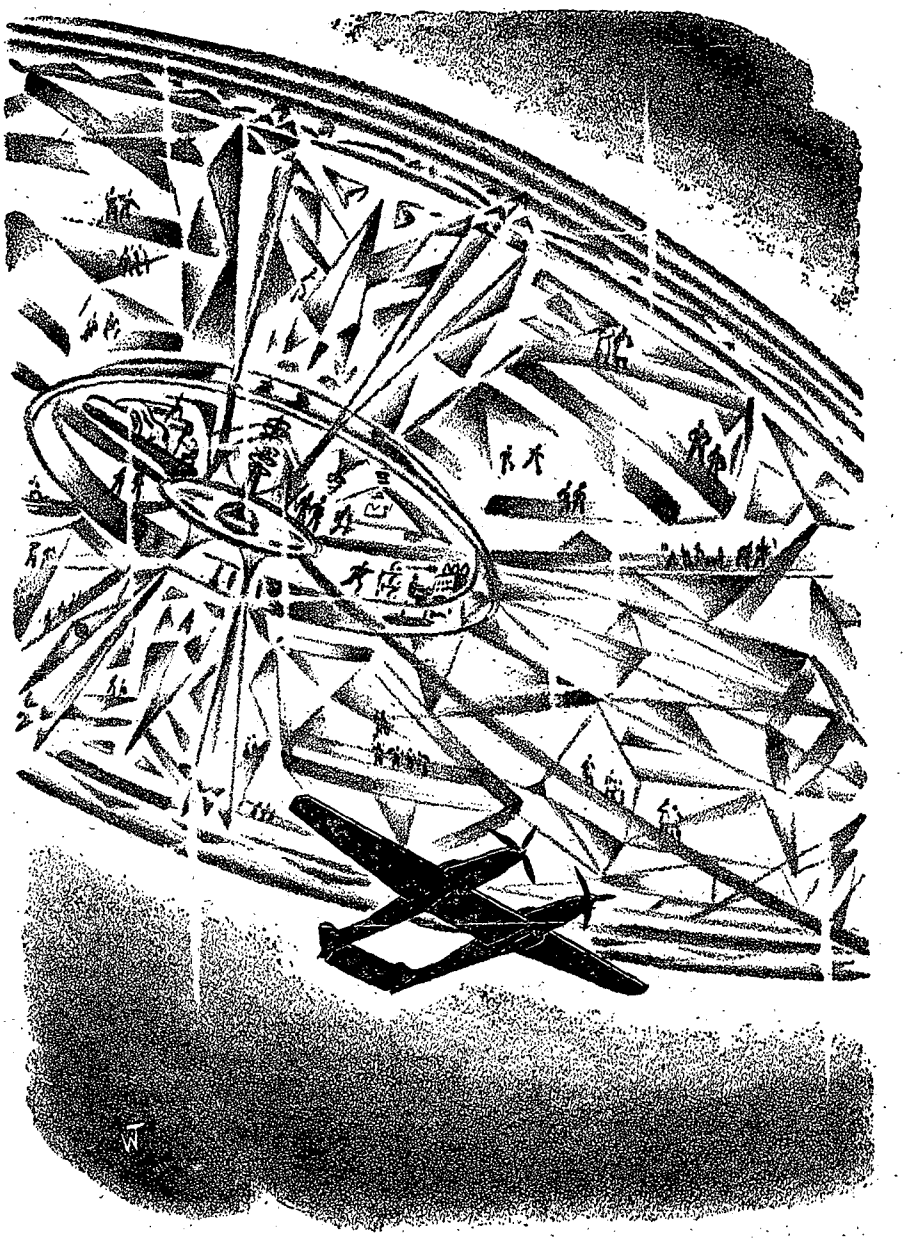

Illustration by Bill Terry

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out the landing gear, but was unhurt.

The next morning Major Raidenfurst, my commander, got me out of bed to be questioned by two men from Project Saucer — Riley, who was a captain, and Wellington, a lieutenant. They proceeded to try to convince me what I'd seen was either meteoric phenomena, hallucinations, or just a plain upset stomach. But strangely, they questioned me about whether or not my plane had acted up before I'd seen the "reflection of my dash lights in the windows."

They yawned and asked me to make out a detailed written report. Then, still looking bored, they left.

I looked up Archie, in the coffee shop, and told him Major Raidenfurst had informed me both our planes had been dismantled and the motors shipped to Washington; and that they'd gone over the ships with a Geiger-counter.

They had given Archie the same routine about hallucination, and he was mad about it. He wanted to know why he wasn't grounded if he was seeing things, as, if that was true, he was unfit to fly an army plane. He told me about Charles Fort and how flying saucers have been seen for centuries. He swore they weren't Russian or American. He also said he was going to buy a good camera and get a picture of one, if it killed him. He pointed out that whoever was in that disk could take maneuvers that would plaster a human against the side of the ship in a bloody pulp.

Then he told me how his motor "froze" and even his prop had stopped revolving. Like it had been highly magnetized. And he'd felt a strange electric prickling. He said the big disk was 250 feet in diameter.

Both of us bought cameras, determined to be able to prove our stories if we ever saw a flying saucer again.

Two weeks later Archie got his pictures. But Major Raidenfurst informed him that they would be confiscated, and must be developed by Intelligence. Archie insisted on being shown the films afterward, and the Major agreed he saw no reason why not.

But the pictures came back "over exposed" with no flying saucers on them. All there was on the whole film was a pair of photos of Archie's girl friends, standing beside his plane. Intelligence's comment was that they were nice dishes, but hardly flying saucers.

Archie really was mad; he'd been literally "captured" for several minutes by two huge saucers who had frozen his plane in mid-air and held it motionless while they apparently inspected him from a distance. There had been portholes, but nothing visible in them. Inside was a glow like neon lights. They they had turned transparent, and vanished!

Archie showed us how the camera was still set as he'd left it, and since Intelligence had said he'd used time exposure, the idea of over-exposure

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was not on that ground.

To our surprise, Major Raidenfurst suggested Archie use color film. Apparently he believed more than he would admit . . .

The next day Archie disappeared, after a frantic radio that was cut off in the middle of a sentence. He'd sighted what he said was a space ship. *And he'd tried to get a picture. His last words:* "Barney—they're going to ram . . .

This was the same day a National Guard flyer got killed chasing "Venus." Only it wasn't Venus.

It was a week before we found Barney's plane, or what was left of it. Only the motor and one wing. Where the rest went was a mystery. We didn't find Archie. I got permission from Major Raidenfurst to continue the search; Archie might have bailed out, and was now lost in the mountains. Even finding his body would be better than this uncertainty.

Two months went by, and I gave up the search. Then, flying with a bunch of rookies, Barney came over my radio to tell me there was a radar indication of an "object" on my tail. I sent the students back toward the field, and tried to close in on it. There was nothing. Then, all at once, I went paralyzed—and I saw the same sort of small disk Archie had told me followed him.

It seemed studying me. I heard a voice in my mind saying not to be afraid, and answering my mental question about it being a "spying device." It was. But whose? There was no answer.

The object suddenly took off, and I followed. It headed straight for me, as if to crash me. I lost my nerve and veered off. It came again. This time I decided to crash it. But it *made the evasion this time, and hurtled up into space and disappeared.*

The students confirmed me — the object had been there, visible at the last.

I called Wright Field. They seemed to be surprised at my information that I'd heard a flying disk "talk." But they said I was probably hypnotized by my dash-lights. Only I'd had my dash-lights out.

The next morning Riley and Wellington arrived. They came to the point immediately. Would I join Project Saucer as an investigator? "What for, chasing butterflies?" I asked.

They showed me a picture of a flying saucer. They admitted flying saucers were real. That they knew nothing about them. They said it was a dangerous job they were offering. I thought of Archie . . .

"I'll take it," I said.

I took off for Wright Field in the morning. But I didn't get there. Two hours in the air, I saw a giant golden globe coming in from space. It seemed a mile in diameter. I began taking pictures.

It was a brilliant orange-gold color and suddenly it struck me that it was hot. *Incandescently hot. But not from friction from its airspeed,*

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certainly. The thing seemed to radiate heat of its own. I could not feel it, but the impression *was tremendous and terrifying.*

Although it was going slowly now, I became painfully aware of the fact that I had waited too long, that I couldn't get out of the way. This thing was going to crash into me—if it didn't burn me to a crisp before contact.

I dropped the camera and nosed my plane down into a steep slant, putting on all the power. If there was any way to get clear, I intended to do it.

But right then came that strange numbing paralysis, that sense of static energies coursing through my plane and my body, and in my mind *a voice*: "Don't be afraid. You will not be harmed. We are friends."

* * *

PART 2

Conclusion

I QUIT thinking. In the face of this unprecedented phenomenon there was no rationalization possible. I was faced with the unknown, with the thing that had "never happened before." I had nothing to go on. I was like an ape out of the Earth's dim past thrust into New York city in a twinkling. I was a fish out of water.

The bulk of the giant object loomed upon me, but in spite of the flaming appearance, it wasn't hot. My plane hung motionless in the air, its motor dead. A flickering covered the area of the great globe nearest me, and the golden color darkened. It wasn't as though an entrance bay opened, as the limits of it weren't that definite. There was a curious flickering, rolling, frosting-like appearance of the edges.

Then I was inside.

The world was gone. I might as well have been on a strange planet for all the Earth meant to me. All around me was that brilliant golden blaze, and for many seconds my eyes refused to give me correct information as to what I was seeing. My mind found it difficult to interpret the signals my optic nerves were carrying. But finally I orientated to the point where I realized I was on the inside of a brilliant photosphere of golden light, which blazed and flickered like the energy screen it apparently must be. When I realized this, I turned slowly in my plane, fighting the paralysis that made motion difficult, to try to see what was at the center of that golden sphere.

Obviously my plane still floated in the air. It seemed to be the same sort of air as that outside the sphere; I could breathe normally.

When my head had turned enough to see what was at the center, my befuddled brain lost all ability to interpret correctly. It was like a dream which is constantly shifting, and assumes no definite shape that can be recognized, but keeps the

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dreamer in continual bafflement. There, floating before me, at the center of the golden screen was a huge—

Could I call it a ship?

Or would I say it was a planetoid?

Was it a "structure" or not?

It *seemed* to be a giant crystal. But then I saw that it was only crystalline in formation. It had definite geometrical form, and its complexity was amazing. It was hard to fix on any one line or plane surface and thereby gain any concept of what portion of the whole it was. I studied it for long minutes and finally came to the concept that it was a geometrical figure, roughly egg-shaped in form, composed of thousands of interlocking shapes that grew more and more definite as I began to geometrize them into their proper places. All at once I knew what it was—a giant ship made of many-colored crystal. There was regularity in it, rows of compartments, plane surfaces that resolved into walks and ways and rooms, and machines and mechanisms that seemed to flash with moving lights instead of moving parts.

And there were people.

Hundreds of people.

They were regarding me from the giant crystal ship with interest. They thronged the walk-ways and peered from within the transparent walls of individual compartments. Up on "top" of the ship was a series of compartments that struck me instantly as being the control rooms. Here were men — and women — dressed in what obviously were uniforms. Brilliant, beautiful, matchlessly faultless uniforms of unimaginable materials.

Others of the people on the ship wore simple white garments, like togas, or colored garments ranging from full capes to mere skirts and breast bands.

My plane had floated now to the side of a sparkling crystal wall. It opened inward and admitted my ship, which settled to the floor while the wall closed behind it. My paralysis lifted. I found myself able to clamber out of the plane to stand swaying on the crystal floor of the giant room in which I found myself.

The brilliant light of the photosphere outside made me squint, and the extreme brightness kept me from staring too long with my eyes wide enough to see much.

BUT I did see the man who stood before me, dressed in a brilliant red and yellow uniform. He was smiling, and he was extending a hand.

Feeling like an utter fool that I was unable to understand all this, I reached out and shook hands with him. The contact suddenly made the whole thing real, and I came down out of the tumbling clouds of my mental confusion. I was standing on a crystal floor in a space ship of giant dimensions, shaking hands with a man like myself. And he was speaking English.

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"Do I seem to be an illusion to you?" he asked.

All at once I laughed. He had broken the spell completely. "You sound like Army Intelligence," I said. "I just wish I had a couple of those birds here with me. Nothing can be more annoying than to be told you have been seeing things when you know you have every evidence of reliable senses to back you up."

"I wouldn't appreciate having any of 'those birds' with you," he said. "We're interested only in keeping too much attention from being directed our way. It is part of our plan that you Earth people should see us, but not discover what we are, or where we come from."

I thought that one over heavily. "That puts me in a peculiar position," I said.

"Not at all," he said. "You will be permitted to return when you like."

He'd known what I was thinking — But it had been obvious at that. "Not consistent with your desire to keep too much attention from being directed your way," I said.

"We would be inclined to think there was little danger from you telling anything we wouldn't want told."

"Why do you think that?" I asked bluntly.

"A friend of yours says so."

"A friend—" I stopped. "You "You don't mean—?"

A hand clapped me on the shoulder and swung me around. "He *does* mean me," said Archie, gripping my hand and pumping it up and down vigorously. "Boy, it's good to see you! Welcome to the good ship *Star of Indus.*"

"Archie — " I said falteringly. There were tears in my eyes, suddenly. "Archie, you—darned fool! We thought you were dead! When I saw what was left of your plane, I was almost sure of it . . . "

"But you kept on looking." Archie looked at me with a peculiar gleam in his eye. "I appreciate that, A. G. You and the Major are a couple of regular guys. That's why I recommended that Raharana invite you on a tour, and explain things to you."

The tall man in the uniform grinned. "We investigated you first, to make sure you'd be all right."

I looked at him. "That little white 'eye' that gave me the going over the other night?"

"Yes. And your description of it as an eye is quite apt. It's exactly that. Television wouldn't be the word for it. It operates on a wavelength far different. But it can relay both sight and sound, and mental waves as well as a hundred other things you wouldn't even suspect existed. However, you nearly ruined the investigation when you tried to crash into the 'eye.' Actual contact with you might have made it too heavy to control, and might have given you a bad case of anemia."

"The thing's like a sponge," explained Archie. "He means it might have 'soaked up' some of your body

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elements if it had made contact. As a matter of fact, that's why the thing became visible to you, when it wasn't at first. These things, when in the atmosphere for a time, take in hydrogen and oxygen and other atmospheric elements, which make them more tangible and visible. What you call radioactivity makes the neon in the assimilated elements glow, which accounts for the light generally seen in connection with the so-called flying saucers."

Raharana spoke up. "If you two don't mind, you might retire to your private compartment and talk things over. I've got some things to do, and we've got to get under way again. There's an army plane coming up fast and he'll be in dangerous range soon. We don't want any more accidental fatalities . . . "

ARCHIE looked alarmed and he grabbed my arm. "Come on, A. G., we'll go to my little cubbyhole." He led me from the crystal chamber where my plane sat. We went down a glistening corridor the floor of which was suddenly moving, and came almost at once to a doorway. The floor stopped moving and we stepped off. I found myself in an apartment that was the last word in bachelor's quarters. I gasped. "Archie, this is magnficent. How on Earth ——"

"Not on Earth," he laughed. "But this is my idea of what Earth living quarters should be; and when the 'Captain' gets the idea of what you want, presto, you get it. Kinda nice, eh?"

"Nice! But what I can't understand is where they got all this stuff, just to set up quarters for you. Certainly they don't—" I paused and examined a painting on the wall, an oil. It was framed magnificently in intricately carved mahogany. "Archie," I said, a strange feeling at the pit of my stomach, "if this isn't an original Titian, I've never seen a Titian!"

"Say!" approved Archie, "you know your art! You're right, it is a Titian."

"Look," I said, grabbing him by both arms and facing him squarely. "If that's really a Titian, there's no record anywhere on Earth of such a painting having been executed by him. I know that damn well."

Archie grinned. I could see he was enjoying himself immensely now. "Right again," he said.

"Then where did it come from?" I challenged.

"Titian painted it—or its equivalent."

"It's equivalent?" I asked blankly. "What does *that* mean? Titian painted it, or the equivalent of painting it? You're not making sense."

"Sit down in this easy chair," said Archie. "This will take some time to explain. And if you're going to understand, I'll have to begin at the beginning."

I sat down in a chair that I'll swear came right out of King Tut's tomb, only it was brand new. I stared

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around the apartment, rapidly becoming more and more confused. There wasn't an item in it that any museum on Earth wouldn't have given a fortune to own. Standing in one corner was a mummy case, the gold leaf on it shining as though it were brand new. It was magnificent. Beside it, King Tut's case was a crude box.

"The case of Menes I," said Archie.

I looked at him. "Start explaining," I said. "There are some things you can't just pop at a guy and expect him to swallow. That's one of them. Menes I is only a legend, so far as actual information about him is concerned. He was the founder of the first Egyptian civilization, which was destroyed in some mysterious catastrophe, to be followed by a thousand years of no record at all, during which Egypt might have been an uninhabited desert for all we know. Besides, this thing looks *new*. It *can't* be the original Menes I case."

Archie sat down opposite me on a magnificent rug. I stared at it while he was answering me. It was a twelve-foot sabre-tooth skin. The head was mounted complete, with gleaming ivory sabres holding it up so that its eyes seemed to stare directly into my own.

"These people have been around for a long time," Archie was saying. "They have collected things like this for more ages than I can even realize. As for it being new, there you are probably no more puzzled than I am. The way they explain it, there can be more than one of a thing, and each of them can still be the original."

I waited.

HE stared at me a moment. "I didn't expect you to believe me," he said, slightly exasperated. "But take that painting for instance. When Titian was alive, he conceived many paintings in his mind. Many of them he did not live to put on actual canvas. But these people, with their marvelous science, are appreciative of art, and they keep close contact with genius. With a mental recording apparatus, they keep each concept of an artist, or musician, or sculptor among the actual objects he creates. By some process I don't understand, these mental conceptions are given reality. In the case of objects already executed, they use a very similar process to 'duplicate' it. The mental basis, they explain, is the first real thing to go into any creation. A thought is a real thing, composed of electrical energy, which is a quality of matter. This electronic form is the basis for the object. Think of a chair, for instance, and that chair needs only to be clothed in wood and glue and nails to become a real chair. If you use the same thought matrix to make another chair, you have two identical chairs, each an original. In the basic analysis, there is only one real chair, the thought chair, and the others are the *same* chair, or rather, extensions of

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the same chair. Am I being clear?"

"You are not!" I said flatly. "But go on. I see you sitting on the skin of a sabre-tooth tiger. I won't question it any more than I'll question what you say. I gather, however, that Titian *thought* of this painting, but never got around to painting it. And these people, using one of their 'eyes,' recorded the thought, and by an electronic process, produced the painting you now have on your wall."

Archie looked at me, his eyes alight. "A. G., you're terrific! That's exactly what I mean. I *knew* you'd get it! You've explained it far better than I did. But then Raharana said you could do it."

I frowned. "This Raharana seems to have some quite decided opinions about me."

"He likes you," said Archie simply.

I thought about it. "I like him, too," I said, reflectively. "He struck me as a *man* the minute I saw him."

Archie caught what I meant. "Oh, he's a man, all right. An Indian, to be correct. He came from India, originally. About the time of the first Indian civilization, eleven thousand years ago—"

"He doesn't look that old," I said, slightly sarcastic. "He doesn't even look dead." I could see the humor was wasted.

"No. He was picked up, like I was."

"Like *you* were? What's the matter with me? Wasn't I picked up too?"

Archie looked at me peculiarly. "You are here by invitation," he said.

"Aren't you?"

"No. I barged in. The result was —more than I expected."

I sighed. "Must you keep talking in riddles? So Raharana was 'picked up'—just as you were—and consequently is not dead after eleven thousand years."

"That's it," Archie blurted out. "That's part of the science of these people; they know how to make you live forever, to all intents and purposes."

I found it hard to ask the next question. "Are *you* going to live forever?"

He nodded. He didn't say anything. And suddenly I knew he wasn't telling me everything because he felt sure I wouldn't believe it. I settled back in my chair. "Archie, I'm going to sit here and listen; and I'm not going to say another word until you're finished; but I want to know everything about this whole setup. Apparently, because I wasn't 'picked up' *I'm* not going to live forever. I don't understand the difference between you and me. So begin talking."

ARCHIE got up, did something to one wall, and suddenly it became transparent. I stiffened in my chair; because outside there was no sign of the brilliant photosphere which had previously surrounded this staggering crystal ship. Instead, I

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could see, far off, the tremendous sphere of the Earth. *I was out in space!*

"We're on our way to the Moon," said Archie. "I might as well begin by giving you the basic facts about what's going on right now. First, this ship is under the command of Raharana, who is eleven thousand years old, and who was born in what today is called India, but in those days was called Indus. This ship gets its name from the old nation. The word 'star' in *Star of Indus* literally means that, because the ship, when visible to Earth people on its trips near the planet, appears like a star, just as you first saw it.

"The ship is part of an expedition engaged in setting up a plan of action on Earth that I do not understand. All I know is that they are mapping and charting a plan to do something to the Earth's atmosphere that will change it in some way, not harmful.

"Raharana lives on the Moon. He has lived there ever since he left Earth, he tells me, with the exception of several trips into interstellar space, one of which lasted two thousand years. He went on a ship like this one, except that it was larger than the Earth, being nearly ten thousand miles in diameter.

"Everyone on this ship originally lived on Earth. As a matter of fact, everyone on the Moon originally lived on Earth. There are persons who lived in civilizations whose existence is so remote in Time that no one on Earth today even suspects existed. I've talked to a woman who lived in an ancient continent in the South Pacific, which is now beneath the ocean. She says she is twenty-one thousand years old. But when you see her, you'll find she looks as young as a girl of twenty-two.

"Well, the current traffic between the Moon and Earth began some three hundred years ago. All those references in Charles Fort's books are references to sightings of the various craft of the Moon People, and the various gadgets they use in contacting the Earth, such as the televisor eyes, the flying saucers, the blue lights, the atomic rockets and the golden spheres such as this one.

"It isn't very flattering to we Earth people to realize that all the scientific progress of the last three hundred years is due to telepathic suggestion, effected by mechanical means such as the 'eye' that 'spoke' to you in your plane—"

"How did you know it spoke to me!" I burst out.

Archie grinned at me. "I knew you couldn't keep quiet!"

I subsided.

"The answer is 'the eye'," he said. "I was watching you through that same 'eye.' It was done at my request, so you could be checked for a visit. Your concern for me was reported to me, and I felt that I couldn't let you go on making a fruitless search that might only get you killed. So I asked that you be invited to have a look-see at the fly-

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ing saucers. I felt that you'd keep anything you saw to yourself, insofar as Raharana thinks wise.

"When I made up my mind to find out what the flying saucers really were, I didn't know that I had any special faculties to aid me in searching them out, but it seems I had. It had something to do with a peculiar structure of my eyes that enabled me to see wavelengths ordinarily invisible to human beings. Cats, by the way, have much the same ability, and some dogs.

"That's why those photographs I took of the flying saucers didn't turn out. All the camera got was a flood of infra-red that completely fogged the film. My eyes should have seen no more, but they registered wavelengths that you might call heat waves only because they were in the infra-red spectrum.

"THAT day when I was picked up I'd just sighted a flying object very high over the mountains. I'd been attracted by a bright flash, then had seen a chain of shiny disks, nine in number, pursuing a weaving, dipping path over the mountains at a speed I estimated at better than eighteen hundred miles per hour. They were flying a peculiar course, and I got the crazy idea that they were laying out a geometric figure of some kind. I acted on that wild hunch, and instead of chasing the disks, turned toward where I thought they'd wind up if they were describing the maneuver I thought they were.

"I was right, and coming around a shoulder of the mountain, I intercepted them. I must have astonished them as much as they did me. In a moment I was right in the middle of the formation. All at once there was a tremendous blue flash; the whole sky seemed to light up with it. The saucers flipped on edge and zipped up out of sight. When I followed them with my eyes, I saw the orange ball you are now riding in. It was about forty miles up, hovering motionlessly. I didn't know that then, the distance, I mean, but they told me later.

"Just about then things began to go black, and I passed out. When I came to, I was aboard this ship. They told me they had picked me up 'just in time,' that only a swift emergency operation had saved my life. It seems they had been laying down a sea of gas preparatory to exploding it in the atmosphere. I had blundered into it, setting it off prematurely. They said it had blown my plane to bits.

"As I remembered the flash before everything went black, it wasn't anything in the nature of an explosion as I understood it, and I didn't pass out for at least a minute after the so-called blast. There was no sound to the explosion, no violence in the air, only that bright light. But they insisted it was an explosion, and a terrific one, more tremendous than a dozen atom bombs."

"What are they doing setting off

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explosions like that?" I asked.

Archie looked at me. "One of the things I can't tell you. But if I'm not wrong, Raharana will tell you later himself. So let's let that part of it go for now."

I nodded. "Okay. But you haven't explained much yet, except what happened to you. As for that explosion, I'm inclined to believe what they told you. If you'd seen what was left of your plane, you'd believe it. There were only two pieces ever found, and they were really blasted. I don't see how you could have lived through whatever happened to that plane, but you did, and that's that."

"Did they—Military Intelligence—examine the wreckage for radioactivity?" asked Archie.

"They did. And they didn't find any. I couldn't find out what their reason was for suspecting there might be."

"They *are* telling the truth!" exclaimed Archie.

"Huh? *Who's* telling the truth? Army Intelligence?"

"No. The Moon People. If they weren't, that plane would have been highly radioactive!"

"I'm *sure* I understand," I muttered.

"I'm sure you *don't*," Archie grinned. "But to get on, I went through what you might call a concentrated course of education, during which I got a quick once-over of who these people are, and what they are doing in their flying saucers. Briefly, they are people who once lived on Earth, who were 'picked up' and given the permanent life treatment. If you're familiar with your Bible, you'll remember how Elijah was taken to 'heaven' in a flaming chariot? Well —"

I sat up straight. *This ship!*"

"Or one like it," Archie corrected. "Flying saucers aren't new, as I told you once before. Even in biblical times, people were seeing them. Ezekiel, for instance. Religious writings and folklore are full of stories of people who never died, but were taken to heaven on some vehicle or other. Well, they didn't die, true, and they went to the Moon, not to heaven."

"Just a minute," I said slowly, "are you going to tell me you've seen Elijah?"

ARCHIE burst out laughing. "A G., I'd never have expected you to ask a question like that. But before you wind up seeing ghosts, I'll tell you that I haven't seen him. I asked Raharana the same question, and he asked me when Elijah had been 'picked up.' When I told him the approximate date, he said he wouldn't know about that, as it was too recent an occurence, if it happened. The Moon People have kept strictly from making further pickups for at least seven thousand years. Picking me up was an accident; it was necessary to save my life—and as for you, you're here only on a visit. There seems to be some rule against it."

"Whose rule?"

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Archie admitted he didn't know. "The only reference they ever make is to the Council of Planners. Even the location of this Council is vague. All I know is that it is very far away —and far, to these people, really means distance. I'd say it wasn't even in the Solar System."

I sat thinking deeply for a moment. "Then what you're saying is that the Moon is not a dead world, but is inhabited by people who have been recruited from the ranks of Earth people by some special process of 'picking them up' and made virtually immortal by some scientific means. These inhabitants of the Moon take a great interest in affairs on Earth, and actually govern its progress to a great extent by serving as the 'inspiration' for all civilized developments on Earth. I gather that they are, for instance, the legendary 'muses' that musicians and composers hear, inspiring great musical compositions; and the source of inventive genius, such as the peculiar way in which Nikola Tesla, as a case in point, invented many of his gadgets which revolutionized the world, such as the alternating current motor he saw 'floating' in the air before him, but which was invisible to his companion. Also, that they exercise some sort of control over Earth people to see that they do not go too far along the road of progress — far enough for instance, to learn also how to live forever, or to travel to the Moon?"

Archie stared at me. "What are you getting at?"

"I've already got at it. Don't you see what I mean?"

"Yes— I do. But I don't believe you're right."

"What if I am?"

Archie looked troubled. "But you aren't."

I sat back in my chair and looked at him. "Archie, do you remember the propaganda campaign that Hitler and Herr Goebbels put on, that nearly wrecked the world?"

"Sure—"

"This yarn you've been spinning sounds like the same line," I said bluntly. "In short, it stinks."

"If I remember correctly," said Archie, "the Goebbels line was the superman line, in which the master race, the Germans, were the only race fitted to rule the world. And there, the thing that struck me hard was the gospel of force. It was the iron fist. I don't see how you can link those tactics with these?"

There was a challenge in Archie's voice that I liked. I rose to it. "I'm not saying it's that crude," I said. "I am riding in one of the most miraculous gadgets any man has ever imagined. I'm here. It's *real*. And it's so far advanced scientifically over anything Earth has to offer, that it's absolutely certain that their propaganda would be equally superior to ours. However, there is one weakness in it that seems very apparent to me, if it is propaganda at all; that is the extremely distasteful one, of the concept that nothing we on

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Earth do is done of our own effort and will. I'm not a puppet on a string, hearing voices that tell me what to do, and by God, you aren't either!"

ARCHIE looked at me a long moment. "I knew I wouldn't be much good at explaining things," he said. "All right, A. G., you've got a good point. A *right* point. If it were true. But it isn't. I know you won't believe it just because I tell you, so—"

Archie stopped speaking and stared at me peculiarly. I stared back, and in a few seconds, I began to peer at him with narrowed lids. Something was happening to Archie. He was becoming blurred before my eyes. I blinked rapidly a few times, but my vision was still normal. Other objects in the room were sharp and clear. Then, as I stared, Archie faded out, vanished!

Almost at once his voice sounded from behind me. I turned, utterly flabbergasted. He was standing there, looking at me, that same peculiar look on his face. "I did that *myself*," he said. "I did it with my own will. I don't think Raharana even suspects I can do it. Now what does that do to your theory?"

I didn't have time to answer, because Raharana stood in the doorway. "Very good, Archie," he said. "You're right. I didn't know you could do that. But don't do it again while this ship is *moving*. I don't know if I could pick you up *again*—you'd be some needle in a haystack to find back behind us somewhere."

He turned to me. "You, too, are right. But if you'll think back, it was your *own* idea that we were *forcing* our pattern of progress on the people of Earth. I'll admit we are responsible for inspiration, but even Nikola Tesla never claimed that the strange externalization of a motor he viewed suspended in the air before him was anything other than his own thought made visible to him by his imagination. Each and every human being who has ever been 'struck with an idea' has not doubted that it was his own idea. Further, he can, and often does, reject it after further deliberation. However, you are right in your suspicions, because this scientific ability to influence Earth people has often been misused. Not by us, but by others. Such misuse is going on extensively at the present time. During the past ten years, for instance, Earth people have devised sciences that are far beyond the scope of their social capabilities to cope with and control successfully. It is not a particularly malicious thing; the bad results are caused by ignorance. When the first atom bomb was exploded, Earth scientists who made it were ignorant of what it would actually do. They had to *test* it to find out. It did things they observed and recorded for future use. It also did things they are unaware of, even today. They are unaware, for instance, of the effect of atomic radiation on Earth's weather—although they

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do have some slight suspicions now. They are unaware, also, of the effect on *us* and *our* civilization of the explosion of atomic bombs. It is more true that in spite of all we can do in the way of 'inspiration' we cannot control the activities of Earth people to an extent that is safe for *us*, much less for them.

"But come, we are landing now on the Moon. I'm sure you'll want to see that. And later, we must return to Earth, where I will demonstrate both the truth of your suspicions, and their error in regard to us."

RAHARANA conducted us to the top of the giant ship, where he placed us in positions of observation. We were dropping swiftly now toward a giant city that lay on a flat plain beneath us. The plain was rimmed by a gigantic circular crater wall that must have been a hundred miles in diameter. The city below covered more than half the area enclosed by the crater. Its size struck me at once with its incongruity. *Such a city could not fail to be observed from Earth* even with the smallest telescope. Something was decidedly wrong here. I glanced upward, toward the Earth. It was a gigantic globe down over the horizon of the Moon, taking up three-quarters of the sky. It could not have been over thirty thousand miles away. I searched the rest of the sky, and almost instantly saw it, twice as large as I had ever seen it on Earth, but familiar none the less. It was the Moon.

I looked at Archie. "Just a few minutes ago, Raharana told us we were landing on the Moon. I will eat every pound of this thing we are landing on, if it *is* the Moon; because if that isn't old Luna out there in space, just as she always is, I'm the victim of one of Army Intelligence's 'hallucinations'!"

"The Air Force would call it an illusion," said Archie, grinning.

"Which?" I said patiently.

"The Moon."

"I said *which!*" I repeated, not so patiently.

"Oh, that one out there. That's the illusion."

"It is?"

"Yes. It's only a reflection. An unpolarized reflection. If you can locate this particular crater in the reflection, you'll find one of the seas which represent the shields that hide these cities from prying eyes. That moon out there that Earth people have been looking at for ages isn't the real Moon at all, but a reflection from the inner surface of the outer limits of the Earth's atmosphere, some 240,000 miles out. Just like a fish looking up at its reflection in the water surface above."

Raharana came over now and spoke. "Does it surprise you that the Moon is actually very close to the Earth, and transparent to ordinary light?"

"No," I said. "It seems very natural to me."

Raharana burst out laughing. "You know, I said the same thing eleven

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thousand years ago! Your sense of humor is very like mine. But, thinking back, I can realize how confused you must be, and I hope you will forgive me for not having given you a sufficient explanation. Actually, it will be quite difficult to explain, and it will take time. The Moon is not unique in being invisible to Earth people—space is full of worlds your astronomers don't even suspect, many of them quite close to the Earth. The sun has a family of planets numbering many times more than the visible ones. Venus was such a planet not so many thousand years ago, but through a near collision with Earth, it became visible to a degree. It is still invisible, as this ship is, except for the secondary photosphere it has acquired; which is why it seems cloud-wrapped and lacks surface detail."

"The same principle that made the tiny 'eye' disk visible to me in my plane?"

"Exactly. That was a time we 'interfered' in the affairs of Earth people—or Earth might have been destroyed, and the Moon along with it. It took all of our scientific knowledge."

He clapped me on the shoulder. "Perhaps while you are on the Moon, we'll give you a chance to see some of Earth's past history. It should prove very interesting to you, and very enlightening. I'm afraid you would find little evidence to support your theory of our violation of your free will."

THE giant golden ship was settling now, and the center of the city revealed itself as a concave resting place for the ship. In a few minutes we settled into the hollow without a jar, and the ship became an integral part of the city.

"You see, they've solved the parking problem," said Archie.

I grinned. "Beautifully," I agreed.

For a few minutes we watched the thousands of people disembark from the ship by uncounted exits, with no confusion, while Raharana gave a few directions to the officers. There was no more fuss about the operation than might be evident were this a giant hotel and a group of guests were casually entering its gardens for a stroll. And indeed, about the ship, now the central building in a fabulously beautiful city, were gardens beyond belief. I had never seen such a riot of flowers and exotic plants, nor such a profusion of fruits of every imaginable shape and color.

"This is incredible!" I exclaimed softly to myself, in awe. "It's . . . heaven!"

Raharana turned to me, smiling. "You make me feel very pleased. I also delight in this place. It is my home, and my people have fashioned it for me according to my personal concepts of beauty. They are very good to me, my people. It is a joy to serve them—as it will be a joy to serve you, and your fellow-men, in the mission I have now been assigned."

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"Does no one work here?" I asked. "This place seems like a paradise."

"Oh no," he corrected, apparently taking my last words as the first to answer; "Paradise is much different. It's located much closer to Earth than we are, and is a much more extensive and verdant garden. There is much less of the mechanical there, while here we have a vast science to do our work for us. Underneath all these gardens are productive machines which would amaze you. However, we all work, and work almost continuously; for these machines are controlled mentally. Thus, even though you seem to observe my people in a moment of leisure, they are actually not relaxing. To tell the truth, furious activity is going on, and every member of the community is working at an almost feverish pace to complete the work that is necessary." He smiled at me. "We are manufacturing a substance Archie here has already encountered."

Archie looked at me peculiarly. "For more explosions," he said. "It's a kind of gas, which they are releasing into the atmosphere of Earth and exploding. Raharana will explain later why it is being done."

Raharana nodded, then indicated the exit. "Let's leave the ship now. I've a council meeting to attend, and you and Archie can tour the city, taking in the sights until I finish my work."

AS we left the ship, a young woman approached. Archie exclaimed when he saw her. "This is the woman I was telling you about. She's more than 21,000 years old, and is official historian of her age, and also keeper of the archives of this invisible world."

"Hello Archie," she greeted. "May I be introduced to your friend?"

"You certainly may! Lee-La, this is my fellow-flyer back on Earth," and he told her my name. She nodded her head graciously and repeated it with liquid tones that made it seem suddenly like a new name.

"I am very glad to know you, and since I've been delegated to show you our city, I'm sure we will get to know each other quite well before the day is over."

I glanced at the sky. "Aren't the days two weeks long here?" I asked.

She laughed. "Yes. But the sun is low, and it will be dark in another twelve hours of your time. I am merely using your time system to adapt events to your thinking."

"How unfortunate," I said.

"How gallant," she said.

Archie frowned at me. "Captain, this is a new side of your character . . . "

Lee-La laughed. "Oh, no! That is far from the truth. The Captain is quite a man with the ladies. And so, perhaps I had better warn him that I can see into his mind quite easily—as well as into his memory."

I turned beet red, suddenly, and she added a note of glee to her laugh. Quite abruptly she took my hand and swung about with the vivacity

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of a young girl. "What would you like to see first?" she asked.

In confusion, I pointed to a magnificent building in the distance. All at once I felt a wave of vertigo, and the scene about me seemed to fade, to be replaced by another. I gasped and looked about. Archie gasped too.

We were standing directly before the arched entrance to the building I had pointed out.

"Don't be so surprised, Archie," she said. "You know how it is done—you did it yourself only a few hours ago, and surprised Raharana. It's really quite an advanced thing, though, and you weren't supposed to be able to do it."

Archie looked at her wryly. "I'm sure I couldn't do it like this, though, and certainly I couldn't include anyone else." He turned to me. "You know, A. G., you pointed out the Archive Building. Lee-La is its manager, you remember I told you."

"The natural place to start on our tour, then," I said. "And frankly, I'm more interested in the how of this place than in the what of it."

"Then let's go inside—walking this time," she said. "If it's history you want, I'm sure we can supply it."

INSIDE, I gazed about in surprise. I'd expected to find a sort of library with millions of books. Instead I stood in what might have been a temple with the pulpit and seats removed. The whole was a great arched ceiling, ornately carved walls with gigantic statues entirely encircling the central amphitheatre, and a marble floor of such colors and intricacy of design as to be almost unbelievable. I became especially awed when I saw that the floor was one piece of marble, without a seam anywhere.

Above my head, suspended in midair, was a great crystal sphere that seemed to float, unsupported. At its center was a brilliant spot of light that glowed like an illuminated diamond, forming the only source of light in the whole building, which was without windows.

"That is a *memoglobe*," Lee-La explained. "We have no such things as books here. All our history is recorded mentally on that globe, and cannot be erased, nor changed in any way. The globe is so constituted that nothing false can be recorded on it either, as insincerity of recording thought would contain a disharmonic which would be rejected. Even if a deliberate attempt to misinform the globe was made, the true thought would be dug out of the subconscious of the recorder and would be registered truly on the globe."

"But how do you read it?" I asked.

"The light. Look at the light," she said. "Fix your attention on it and put yourself in a receptive frame of mind. Curiosity concerning any particular event or period will automatically bring out the desired information."

"Bring it out? How?" I glanced

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about for loudspeakers, telescreens, or some such system of dissemination.

She smiled. "Look at the light, and you will see."

"The entire history of Earth, and of the Moon is recorded in that globe" said Archie. "Just think of the particular thing you want to review."

I stared at him, then up at the globe. "The *entire* history . . . ?" I said slowly. I thought suddenly of my tenth birthday. Certainly *that* would not be recorded . . .

* * *

I TORE at the strings enclosing the package rather eagerly. It felt like something soft inside, and I was almost certain what it was. As the last piece of paper fell aside, my suspicion was confirmed.

"A catcher's mitt!" I yelled. "Boy, a *real* catcher's mitt! Now I can join the team."

"You certainly can," said my father with a pleased grin at my reaction to the birthday gift. "But I warn you, the catcher's position isn't an easy one. Some of these balls come in mighty fast."

"You were a catcher in the Big Leagues," I reminded him. "You used to catch some of the fastest pitchers ever!"

He grinned reminiscently. "And I used to have trouble getting my swollen hand out of the mitt after a game," he said. "I was big for my age when I got *my* first mitt, you're a little fellow . . . "

"I'm gonna be a catcher," I said doggedly.

"Sure you are," he said. "You'll grow faster than I did from now on. That's one reason I want you out on that field."

"How about burning a few in to me . . . ?" I asked eagerly. "Right now, out in the yard . . . "

"If that's what you want," he said, "that's what you get. But don't blame me if you can't handle your knife and fork for supper!"

I turned and raced for the back door, shoving my small hand into the mitt . . .

* * *

"YOU see," Lee-La said. "It *is* recorded."

I blinked, looked away from the hypnotic light in the globe, and the transition from boyhood to manhood almost staggered me. I looked at her in suspicion. "I was *living* that!"

"Re-living it," she corrected.

"Is . . . *everything* recorded on that thing, and can *anybody* read it?" A slow burn was coming up my neck and flooding over my face even before she answered.

"Is there anything there you wouldn't want read?" she teased.

I stared at her. I looked so long that her own face began to turn a delicate shade of pink. Then I grinned.

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"No . . . I guess not," I said. "Besides, all there is on that thing is about thirty-two years, and I can imagine what would be on, for instance, your record. Didn't Archie say you were 21,000 years old?"

"Do I *look* it?" she asked, returning my stare.

"Two hundred and ten centuries haven't changed the woman in you a bit," I said. "You still won't give a direct answer when a man asks your age! No, Lee-La, you don't look it!"

"Would you like to look at *my* record?"

"Why not?" I asked. I turned to the globe and looked up at the light. "Let's take your *eighteenth* birthday . . . "

* * *

I PATTED the flame-flower gently into place in my long hair, and looked at myself in the burnished copper mirror on the stone wall. My slim, but delicately curved body molded the sheer white gown in a way that met my full approval. Surely Nu-Lan would be proud of me today at the coronation. Young though I was, much too young to be queen of all Pan, I felt that I could rule the vast tri-continent Empire as well as had my father before his assassination.

Nu-Lan was Vice-Emperor, and had ruled for the three years until I was of legal age, and he'd looked forward fondly to this day. How often he had assured me that being Empress would be easy, for he would stand behind me, advising, guiding . . .

The door was flung open, and I turned, expecting to see Nu-Lan come to fetch me to the ceremony in the great temple of the Sun. But my welcoming smile faded, and instead, a wave of sudden terror swept over me. This was not Nu-Lan, but his minister, Ag-Ghan. I had always hated him, and always distrusted him. Many times I had spoken of it to Nu-Lan, but he had dismissed it as the imaginings of a child. "Ag-Ghan is most trustworthy," he had said. "I would place the Empire in his care, if emergency arose, with perfect confidence."

But now, my terror grew, for I knew that under no circumstances would it have been Ag-Ghan who came to me in my chambers, rather than Nu-Lan on this important occasion, unless . . .

"Nu-Lan . . . !" I gasped.

"Is dead," Ag-Ghan said shortly. "As for yourself, you will remain here, and you will make no attempt to leave this room. There will be no coronation today."

At the cruel look in his eye, I suddenly felt faint, and a wave of blackness rushed over me and I seemed to fall into a bottomless pit . . .

* * *

"EVEN condensing the history," said Lee-La, taking my hand and turning me from the globe,

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"it would take thousands of years to re-view the history of the Earth since that black day. Let me take you on a tour of the city in an air-car while I tell you of it myself, very briefly. You will not need to know much to understand what you wish to understand. With you, Time is a vastly different thing than with us, and you have not the mental development to check into recorded history in this manner without loss of time, or, as I should say, without *duration.*"

We left the building and an air-car was waiting at the entrance. We climbed into it and seated ourselves in the small, saucer-shaped craft which immediately took off, although Lee-La seemed to operate no controls, even had there been any visible. We soared slowly over the city, and in between remarks concerning the points of interest below, she told me the story of her life in very brief summations:

"That day you saw, my eighteenth birthday, I was to have been made Empress of Pan, which was a group of three continents very close together in the South Pacific where now rolls only ocean and nothing remains of my ancient home but a few small islands. Japan was a part of the northernmost continent, and remains to this day, but the Japanese are not true descendants of my race, being a mixture of Asiatics and Zha-Pans. Zha was the name of the northern continent. But, as you saw, I was made a prisoner of Ag-Ghan, who had caused Nu-Lan to be slain and himself took over the reins of government.

"There was revolt in Semu-Pan, the easternmost continent, where existed the true birthplace of Man on this planet; it is there that the legendary "garden of Eden' existed, only it wasn't a garden, it was almost the entire continent below the mountains that now make up the Hawaiian Chain.

"For many years the fighting went on, and the people became more savage and less moral until I was ashamed of them. Then I was rescued by the Semu-Pans, and because there seemed to be some hope of reestablishment of the Empire in peace, I made the mistake of taking up arms to that end. War is war, and its end is death. I paid with my Earth-life, at least, for that act.

"I was recaptured by Ag-Ghan, and was to be sacrificed on the fiery altar of Mu-Ghan, who had become the idol-god of Mu-Pan, the western continent, when the miracle of my life occured. I was snatched from the very Altar by a mysterious flying globe whose brilliance blinded all who saw. Indeed, they must have thought it was their Sun-god, Mu-Ghan, who had come for me in person.

"But it was not; it was a flying ship of the Earth's second moon, which had been disturbed in its orbit by an atomic explosion when a rocket bomb had gone astray in space and been carried into its grav-

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itational field. The scientists of Zha-Pan had miscalculated, not knowing the real nature of space, nor the actual distance of the second moon.

"I was among many picked up for information by the Second Moon inhabitants, who knew their world was doomed to crash to Earth because of the displacement in its orbitic balance. They could not save their own world, but they could lessen the shock to Earth, which they did. That is, they guided the Second Moon so that it crashed where I prayed it should crash. I told them of the wickedness of the Panic Empire and its three continents, and of the peaceful, if primitive, nature of the other Earth continents. I felt that if my maddened people were destroyed, the race of Man on Earth might have some chance for a righteous and peaceful future, uncontaminated by the mad war fever that had gripped Earth's most civilized race in 50,000 years.

"Because Pan was my responsibility, I was given a part in the work to destroy it and save the rest of Earth's inhabitants. From this larger moon, we performed an interplanetary engineering miracle that has never been equaled in this area of space. To put it briefly, we were able to guide the Second Moon into a crash directly in Tri-continental Pan.

"The Second Moon was small, tiny-by comparison with Earth, but it smashed a hole through the surface crust to the internal fires, and in the ensuing eruption and earthquake, the entire Empire of Pan sank into the sea, miles deep, and in one night my sixty-five million subjects perished in flame and water.

"As a result I, the Empress, the mistaken, inexperienced girl who had sought to fight for what she thought was right, became the greatest murderer of all time. For it had been in my power to cause the fighting to cease, and the atomic rocket would never have been launched."

LEE-LA's voice ceased for a moment, and I glanced at her to see that her face was white with the memory of what she had just told us.

"Not so," I said quickly. "Hindsight is never a good judge."

"True. But error does not nullify responsibility—and a country's ruler is responsible for his country."

"But you were not yet the ruler. You were never officially crowned."

"You are kind," she said, smiling at me, once more her cheery self. "But you will find that such judgment is an error. One must suffer for error, to learn how to do correctly. It is our acts which bring results, not ceremony. My act was of tremendous significance, and I have learned a tremendous lesson thereby. And because of what I have learned, I have chosen to throw in my lot with Raharana to prevent this new danger which threatens the world of my birth.

"It was only just that now, 21,000

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years after that first atomic bomb, retribution should be visited on the remnant of my people, the Zhapanese. Those who live by the sword . . . "

"Then America has its own retribution in store—" I interrupted.

"Perhaps, perhaps not. It may be that the cycle is completed. America may only have been the instrument, and the responsibility lies elsewhere. But I agree that war is not a wise course, and all participants will suffer. It may be, however, that we can prevent a new basis for retribution, do something to save Earth's newest civilization from the same destruction that visited its ancient forerunner."

"But Raharana said you weren't interfering in the affairs of Earthmen, that we still had our free will."

"That is true. Just what effect, do you think, the affair of the flying saucers is having on the conduct of the war plans of the Earth nations?"

"Apparently none," I admitted.

"And the blue lights that many Earthmen have seen; the flashes of our explosions of seas of gas in your upper atmosphere?"

I shrugged.

"No more than the blue flash of lightning," she said.

"But then, what is the purpose of the explosions?"

"I will leave that for Raharana to tell you. Perhaps he may chose not to tell you, prefering that you also maintain any free mental attitude you may have."

"But what if I tell all I've seen here, when I get back?"

"You think they will believe?"

I stared at her a moment.

"No," I said.

She smiled slightly, and pointed below us. "There is the most famous fruit garden in the entire solar system. It contains the fruits of every planet, of every satellite or asteroid capable of bearing life. It contains, moreover, the fruits of a thousand invisible worlds, and of hundreds of other solar systems. It has been added to for more than seventy thousand years, and ships come here from distant galaxies merely to make their contribution to the famous collection."

"I am more interested in your story," I said. "You have told me of your few years on Pan, but what of the hundreds of centuries since? What have you been doing?"

"I haven't always been historian and keeper of the archives," she said. "For many centuries I traveled the spaceways, and I have worked on many invisible worlds, and on some visible ones. Always I have accepted what responsibility was given me, but never since that fatal decision to fight on Pan have I taken any responsibility to myself. Consequently, I have become rather well-known for my many successful missions, and I hope to become as successful here. As for the details of those centuries, they do not concern you now, nor the problem at hand, which is actually your prob-

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lem. In seeking so stubbornly for the answer to the mystery of the flying saucers (our ships venturing into your denser atmosphere) you have in a way taken on a responsibility, which, fortunately, is solely to yourself. I am sure that Raharana will want you to tell your story to Earth people to prove to you that he is right that our actions in no wise influence the exercise of your free will or the free will of any other Earthman or woman."

SUDDENLY she became rigid, and after an instant of intent concentration, as though she heard a faraway voice, she shot the air-car downward toward the building that now represented Raharana's ship, the *Star of Indus*. "We have unexpected work to do," she said tensely. "A hydrogen-bomb explosion has just taken place on Earth, at a place called Kwajalein. We must hurry to prevent a disaster. Now you will see why we employ the gas explosions!"

I gripped her arm. "Disaster," I said. "To whom?"

"To the people of your own country, America. We must hurry to close the 'windows of heaven' that bomb has opened—if you don't mind my reference to a biblical phrase?"

"I don't mind," I mumbled, completely baffled. I turned to Archie. "Do you know what's going on?"

He nodded soberly. "Partially. But my experience has been with plutonium bombs, not hydrogen. I can only deduce that the 'windows of heaven' are the same ones that were opened in Noah's time, according to the biblical legend."

"You mean *rain*?" I said with a frown.

"I'm afraid I do. But we won't have time to go into it now. Raharana wants us to come to his control cabin."

"He does?" I said stupidly.

"Yes."

I turned to look at Lee-La, but she was gone. We were alone in the air-car, just now landing before the main entrance to the *Star of Indus*."

I groaned. "That's one thing I'll *never* get used to!" I said. "For an instant I thought she'd fallen out!"

Archie grinned as he led the way into the ship. "Lee-La couldn't fall," he said. "At least not out of an air-car!"

Inside the ship all was orderly bustle. We made our way to the control room, where we found Raharana and Lee-La busily poring over complex charts and making computations incomprehensible to me.

Raharana finished, turned to us with a smile. "Now you are to see in action what I promised to explain to you."

"What's going on?" I asked. "Lee-La said something about an H-Bomb explosion on Earth . . . "

For answer, Raharana turned to the wall and fingered a switch. A large panel on the wall suddenly became translucent, then swam with color that became an aerial scene on Earth. I recognized the circular

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ring of islands known as Kwajalein from pictures I'd seen of it during the war. "You can see for yourself . . . . " he said.

As I watched, I saw huge steel towers on one small island of the group which formed the ring. It was completely deserted, but miles away, at protected vantage points, observers were posted. In the air were pilotless planes, and in the water and on the island, multitudes of recording contraptions, penned animals, weird construction of buildings, concrete emplacements, metal structures, tanks, guns, autos, railroad cars, locomotives, every conceivable weapon of warfare, mode of transportation, stationary setup. Even a glass greenhouse.

All at once the whole screen went brilliant white, with a brilliance to rival the sun. Then an awesome pillar of flame and smoke shot skyward at incredible speed. The whole test island disappeared. Observation planes in the sky dissolved in the blast and were no more. I was witnessing the most terrific atom explosion in the history of atom explosions.

"My God!" said Archie.

I didn't say anything; I couldn't. The scene faded.

"WHAT you saw was a record," said Raharana. "Now we'll look at the events going on presently . . . " He touched the switch again, and the scene became vivid in the light of a tropic day.

At first I could not recognize the scene as the same. Instead of metal towers hundreds of feet in height, the crowded island with its myriad of objects, there was only a blasted, unrecognizable, rocky surface, fused here and there with fantastic lumps that might have been almost anything. Only around the shores of the island were there things recognizable — here a shattered tank, there a blasted tree stump, in another place the water-level hulk of a destroyed landing craft or small boat.

"The whole island was destroyed, a result far in excess of their anticipations," Raharana volunteered.

"It's incredible!" I said stupidly. "It is as though the gates of Hell blasted open on that place."

Raharana touched another switch and suddenly the whole Earth was visible in the scene. Surrounding it, in a weird violet color was what I guessed instantly to be its atmosphere, although it extended to an incredible distance, at least 10,000 miles. Above the Pacific, a tremendous funnel, rotating swiftly in an upward direction, had formed in the stratosphere. As I watched, new colors came into being, as though illustrating air currents, and a flood of red surged across the Pacific from all directions, converging on Kwajalein, and then funneling upward in the reversed whirlpool. A blanket of blue moved down across North America from the polar regions.

"You are witnessing what is happening to the air currents in the

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ower atmosphere of Earth, the currents which make the weather." Raharana's voice was disturbed. "Observe how the yellow wave is sweeping up the Mississippi Valley from the Gulf of Mexico. That is water vapor, and observe how it is becoming green where it meets the blue from the pole, over Kansas and Missouri. That is a cold front meeting a warm front, and it is producing rain. Incredible rain. It is that rain we must lessen in volume to prevent a disaster."

Lee-La broke in. "This bomb explosion has done what all bombs have done, punched a hole in the stratosphere and created currents which make for flash floods, intense cold waves, earthquakes, and violent windstorms—only this time a tremendous quantity of dust has been released in the upper seas which most of your scientists do not suspect exist. There is mention of it in the Old Testament, of the "waters above the waters" and "the firmament above and the firmament below," in Genesis. If this water begins to condense around the dust particles, which are necessary as the nucleus of every drop of rain, there will be a flood to rival the Flood of Noah. That we must prevent."

I glanced about wildly. "Then why don't we hurry back to Earth and begin . . . " My voice stopped as I saw, with utter surprise, that the *Star of Indus* was no longer a building in a city of an unknown Moon of Earth, but in space, already quite near Earth. Raharana smiled at me. "We are nearing our destination now," he said quietly. "Come, we will prepare to restore the air currents to normal, and precipitate the dust."

HE led the way into the bowels of the ship, and here I found incredible machines, composing a great portion of the ship. There were huge tanks containing a violet liquid, and thousands of nozzles leading from them to the exterior of the ship. Already many were turned on, and as the ship came to a halt above the Pacific, a huge amount of violet gas began seeping down and spreading itself in clouds in the stratosphere. After almost an hour the operation stopped and the *Star of Indus* shot upward. Below us, as Raharana gave an order, there was a blinding blue flash that spread through the whole cloud of gas, which had become invisible as it dissipated through the atmosphere. There was no blast, as in an explosion, but I got the distinct impression that there had been a tremendous explosion.

"That's what got me!" said Archie, gripping my arm. "I flew right into the middle of such a cloud of gas and touched it off prematurely."

I looked once more at the blue light, fading now, then at Archie. "Archie," I said hoarsely. "You were in an explosion like that, and *lived* to be picked up?"

"No," he said. "I wasn't alive . . ."

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He looked at me strangely.

"Then that's what you meant when you said there was a difference between the way I was picked up and the way you were picked up, and why I couldn't be immortal as you claim you now are?"

Raharana spoke up. "The human life can be reconstructed on sub-atomic levels, even after death. We brought Archie back to life, even though his sub-form had been shattered by the sub-atomic blast. Basically, he was deprived of his magnetic field which forms the binding force for his sub-atomic structure, just as we have disrupted the magnetic field locally in the Earth's atmosphere, and destroyed the rising cloud of dust particles which would unite with the moisture in the upper air and precipitate it if allowed to do so. We cannot reconstruct Archie's physical form as it originally was—although it could be done at surface levels, where he originally existed, in a sort of pseudo form, just as our ships and instruments take on a sort of pseudo-form substance out of the elements of the atmosphere and thus become visible to human eyes operating in the visual range of ordinary light."

I looked about me with the hackles suddenly rising on my neck. "Ghosts, that's what you are! Why don't you say it—you're dead, all of you!"

"No," denied Raharana. "We *aren't* dead. We'd be no different from you if we descended into the full surface magnetic field of the Earth. Your scientists already know something of what happens to matter out here—they sent up a rocket to 250 miles which never came down. They have a good idea of what happened to it."

"What?"

"Much the same thing as happened to the dust cloud we have just neutralized — that dust will never come down either, nor any water with it."

Lee-La added: "The water in the upper air is normal water, but is acted upon by entirely different electro-magnetic forces, so that it is water only to people like us, and not to people on the surface. As an example, just what is water like six miles deep in the ocean, under such terrific pressure and different electro-magnetic currents? Again, your scientists suspect the truth, that it is not ordinary water at all, but more like a solid than a fluid."

"YOU see," said Raharana gently, "we are not acting to interfere in Man's affairs. We *could* prevent his use of atomics, but we do not. We only give him a chance to *continue* his free use of ideas and talents—by striving to protect him from unforeseen disaster at his own hands; such as this torrent from the upper air we have just averted."

I was silent a moment, then I nodded. "I see," I said.

"We are only sorry that we cannot prevent the disaster that is ov-

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ertaking Kansas and Missouri. Normal rainfall will cause a flood that will be known as the worst in American history. Luckily, there is a limit to the amount of rainfall that can come from the sub stratosphere."

Archie turned to me and stuck out his hand. "Well, A. G.," he said. "This is where we say goodbye . . ."

I looked surprised. "Goodbye . . . but what . . . ?"

"Archie has developed many powers I had not suspected he might, so soon," laughed Raharana. "He has just read in my mind that we are going to drop you off in your plane again, because we have other work to do and we won't be coming back this way very soon. I had intended showing you more, but it would serve no good purpose. I see you are convinced of our good intentions, and of your surface people's continued freedom of action—which is why I had you picked up. Now it's time for you to return. Besides, there might be unpredictable results to your sub-atomic structure if your stay here were greatly lengthened."

I gripped Archie and embraced him. There were tears in his eyes. As I stepped back, I found that all of us were standing beside my plane in the crystal chamber in which I'd first seen the interior of the *Star of Indus*. I took Raharana's hand too, and thanked him.

"Will I ever see you again?" I asked, doubt in my voice.

"If you wish it," he returned enigmatically. "I have been here eleven thousand years, and I expect to be here a good many thousands more . . ."

Thoughts whirling in my head, I turned to Lee-La and took her hand. She smiled at me, and then kissed me on the cheek. "Goodbye," she said. "I have a hunch you'll see us all again, from the thoughts in your mind now."

I turned and stepped into my ship, and almost at once the ports in the side of the *Star of Indus* opened and the plane floated out into the air. Below us was the shore of California, as I turned in the cockpit to look at the ship, I could see Raharana and Lee-La and Archie standing on the bridge waving at me. All at once the ship disappeared as I floated through the brilliant photosphere which was once more magnetically surrounding it, and the peculiar crackling of electricity came into my plane and my body tingled. I felt the strange paralysis that lasted only a few minutes as the plane dropped swiftly into denser air. Then as the paralysis left me, I heard Archie's voice in my mind.

"Take it easy, pal. And don't chase flying saucers—now that you know what they are."

Then the voice was gone, and I looked up to see the giant ship, but it was gone too. Nowhere was there even a speck of brilliance that might be the *Star of Indus*. It had vanished.

"Into the sub-atomic!" I said

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aloud, with impulsive conviction.

* * *

I LANDED the plane in California. I had been aloft nearly two days, and my gasoline supply wasn't half exhausted. I reported to Wright Field and said I'd changed my mind about joining Project Saucer.

Riley and Wellington flew to me for an interview, and I decided to tell them the whole story. They didn't believe me. Or at least they acted as if they didn't. I think I puzzled them a lot.

But what puzzled them most was how I stayed aloft two days without refueling. I'm sure they must have checked all the possible places I could have refueled to determine the truth of my story. But I have never had any indication that they did. If they didn't, they are avoiding that confirmation for a reason. Maybe it's fear that they might find I *hadn't* refueled—and Project Saucer doesn't like mysteries. The Flying Saucer is an hallucination. If you don't believe it, ask them, anytime!

You don't have to believe me either. After all, look where you're reading this story . . .

But next time you see blue flashes in the sky and hear no thunder, maybe it *isn't* lightning.

THE END

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THE *REAL* FLYING SAUCERS"

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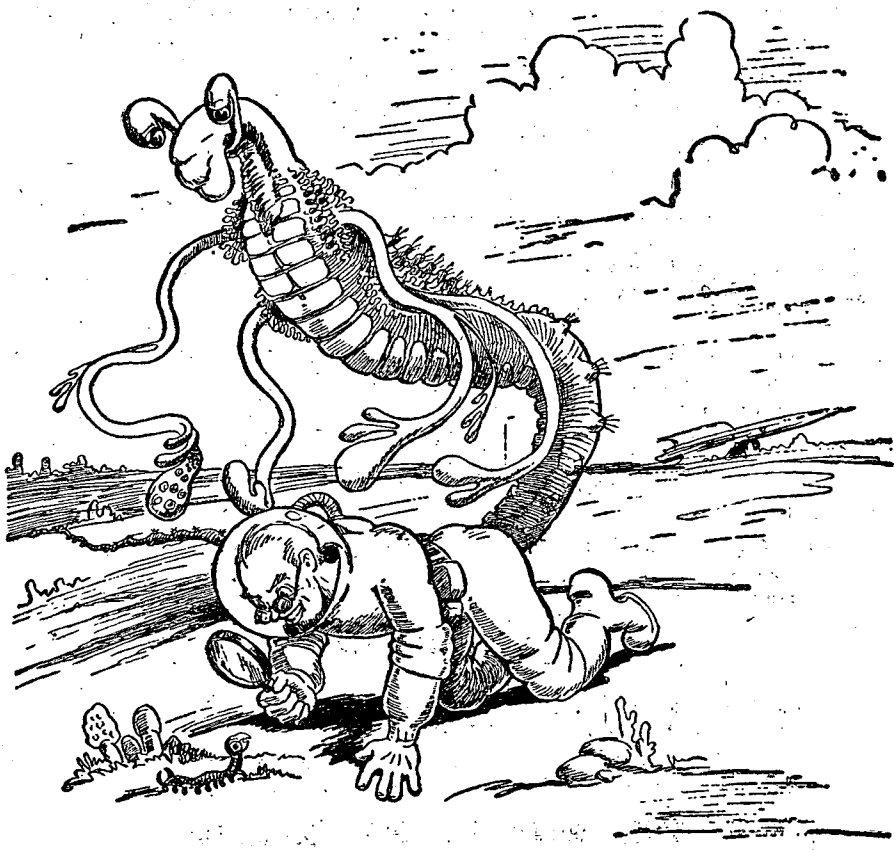
SPECIAL FEATURES

THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay $1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in the world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.



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Science Fiction Book Reviews

There has never been anyone in science fiction quite like "Skylark" Smith. He didn't invent space opera —Edmond Hamilton, for one, had been doing very well by space battles, bug-eyed-monsters, and world-savings for some time before Dr. E. E. Smith introduced us to Seaton, Crane, and the first "Skylark of Space" He wasn't—and isn't—a master at characterization, intricate plottings, or breathtaking scientific concepts. But from the first page of the first Skylark yarn there has been a kind of youthful enthusiasm about every fresh Smith tale which somehow makes the most preposterous exploits of the most incredible people believable—or at least makes you want to believe in them.

In 1936 Dr. Smith launched his Lensman series with "Galactic Patrol," and we all knew he had topped himself. As story followed story, it was evident that he was holding something in reserve—that he was working out a pattern of cosmic villainy and heroism purely his own. "Galactic Patrol," now published by Fantasy Press (273 *p. Ill.* $3.00), turns out to be not the first but the third of the Lensman series, which began with "Triplanetary" (*Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa.* 1948. 287 *p. Ill.* $3.00) and was continued in the completely new book, "First Lensman" (*Fantasy Press.* 1950. 306 *p. Ill.* $3.00.

In the rewritten "Triplanetary" Dr. Smith brought out of the wings the directors, and, if you like producers, of the galactic pageant he was developing in the Lensman yarns —two vastly old, vastly powerful races, Arisia as the personification of good, Eddore as the ultimate in evil. He introduces us to Conway Costigan and Virgil Samms of the Patrol and enlists us with them in an all-out war against the fiendish Gray Roger and his space pirates, then into an even more bitter struggle with the monstrous iron-seeking Nevians from the other side of the Galaxy. With Costigan, the glamorous Clio Marsden, and the durable Captain Bradley prisoners of Nevia, Samms and Company on the outside making with ever-more-super scientific defense and offense, and Roger supplying an uncomfortable third corner, hell breaks loose in a quiet way. It always does in a Smith yarn.

"First Lensman" is brand new, written especially to link "Triplanetary" with the Lensman series proper. Virgil Samms goes to Arisia and is fitted with the first Lens, that literally living jewel, attuned to its wearer's life-force and personality, which enables him to tap the mental and physical powers bred into him and his race. Nevia had forced mankind out of the Solar System into the hurly-burly of the Galaxy itself, and that is the scene on which this new act is played out. The founding of the Galactic Patrol results as man-

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kind comes up against the mysterious forces of Boskone on assorted planets and among assorted races. Good and evil come to grips in a thoroughly delightful political and physical shemozzle ending in the inauguration of one Roderick ("Rod the Rock") Kinnison as President of North America.

Now, with "Galactic Patrol," we are at last fully launched into the final upswelling of Civilization under the guidance and guardianship of the brotherhood of the Lens. From here in the story belongs to the Kinnisons, though the line of Samms is hovering nearby in the person of its offshoot, Clarissa MacDougall.

Probing for trouble with the ranks of Boskone, Kim Kinnison meets it in double portions. Slapped down, but hard, he is picked up by the reptilian Velantian Worsel, who is going to be a very old and very good friend before the series ends. He helps the Velantian obliterate the unspeakable Overlords of Delgon, meets another non-human pal in Tregonsee of Rigel IV on the incredible planet Trenco, gets himself mashed to little bits by the Wheelmen of Aldebaran I (and fitted together again by the flaming-haired Mac), and after going back to Arisia for further instruction, comes face to face with Helmuth, "who speaks for Boskone," in an all-out showdown.

In the original Lensman serials, Doc Smith kept Arisia a mystery and Eddore completely behind the scenes. Gradually the pattern took shape, but there was always one more revelation to be made, one more mystery to be solved—behind Boskone, behind Ploor. The impact of the final design was tremendously effective. For a good many of us, Doc Smith spoiled a good deal of this suspense when he dragged Arisia and Eddore into the open in the rewritten "Triplanetary" and kept them there, pulling on the strings of their human and monstrous puppets, in "First Lensman." He has thought better of this in "Galactic patrol" and left the development of the story just about if not entirely as it was—and it is a better story for the fact. Indeed, for maximum enjoyment of the Lensman yarns I recommend that you start reading them with "Galactic Patrol," follow straight on through to the penultimate "Children of the Lens," and *then* go back to "Triplanetary" and read 'em all through again.

Lloyd Eshbach, *maestro* of Fantasy Press, is giving the Lensman books one of his smoothest production jobs. In the first two Donnell handled the very effective vignettes which introduce each chapter; in the new volume a new artist, Ric Binkley, is carrying on the old tradition and doing it well. He has created a Clarissa MacDougall with individuality and character in place of the usual Hollywood prettiness, and for that he rates a special medal. We'll be waiting for the rest. To coin a word, they're cosmic.

P. SCHUYLER MILLER

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PERSONALS

Don Willson, N. R. S. S., North Wilmington, Mass. wants the address of John Rosso who lives somewhere in Missouri. Also, will sell or trade: Books—1984 , The Cosmic Geoids, The Conquest of Space, The Big Eye, A Matter Of Life And Death, Great Mischief, and Looking Backward; pocketbooks: The Science Fiction Galaxy, The War of The Worlds, The Man Who Sold The Moon, Worlds Within, and The Limitations of Science; magazines: aSF Jan '46, Aug & Sept '47, Feb, June July, Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov & Dec '48, Jan, Feb, Mar, Oct; Nov '49 . . . *TITANIA No. 1, featuring material by Will F. Jenkins (Murray Leinster), Oscar J. Friend, Clark Ashton Smith and Frank Belknap Long, as well as having a printed cover by Joe Gross and illustrations by Marv Friedman, is now available. 30 pages for 25c. Send to Queens Science Fiction League, P. O. Box 4, Steinway Station, Long Island City, Queens, New York* . . . Winchell Graff, 300 W 67th St, N Y C 23, N Y wants to obtain the following mags in good condition: Horror, Terror, Strange Tales, Oriental Stories, Spicy Mystery, Spicy Adventures. Will pay $1.50 per copy . . . *Fantopics, a new fanzine is now being published by Fred Hatfield, 7620 Abbott Ave Miami Beach, 41 Fla. Contains articles on stf, music, classified ads, and miscellaneous material. 10c per copy. Of particular interest to jazz and Dixieland fans* . . . Milton Kramer, 165 Ten Eyck Walk, Brooklyn 6, N Y will buy or trade science-fiction books and magazines . . . *Want E. R. Burroughs' Moon Maid, Tanar of Pellucidar, Land of Terror, The Land That Time Forgot, War Chief, Back To The Stone Age. Would also like to correspond with Burroughs fans. Karl Olsen Jr., 64 4th St., Wood-Ridge, N. J.* . . . Will sell the following books, in fine or mint condition for as low as half price plus shipping costs: The Martian Chronicles; I, Robot; Adventures In Time & Space; Men Against The Stars; Strange Ports Of Call; Big Book of Science Fiction; Sidewise In Time; A Gnome There Was; The World of Null A; Beyond This Horizon. Walter Rothstein, 238 W. 106 St., New York 25, N. Y. . . . *Douglas Mitchell, Ste. 11-406 Notre Dame Ave., Winnepeg, Manitoba, Canada wants back issues of Other Worlds* . . The old Stf Trader has been revived by Jack Irwin, Box 3, Tyro, Kansas. Stf Trader is a fanzine that specializes in ads for selling and trading back issues of mags . . . *Will buy for 25c per copy or will trade five stf mags (recent back issues in good condition) for any copy of the following: Bulletin, Dianamic, Dia-Gram, Flash Answer or any other publication of a Dianetic group. Mrs. Vincent Turner, 2407 Crane Avenue, Detroit 14, Mich* . . . Have 54 Burroughs and a few Arkham House books for sale. Send stamped self-addressed envelope to J. W. Williams, 1649 11th St., Santa Monica, Calif for free list . . . *Stf mags in excellent condition for sale; Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Vol 1 No. 2; FFM, Apr, June & Aug '49; FN, July '49; FA, Mar & Dec '49, Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, June & Oct '50; AS, Oct & Dec '49, Feb,*

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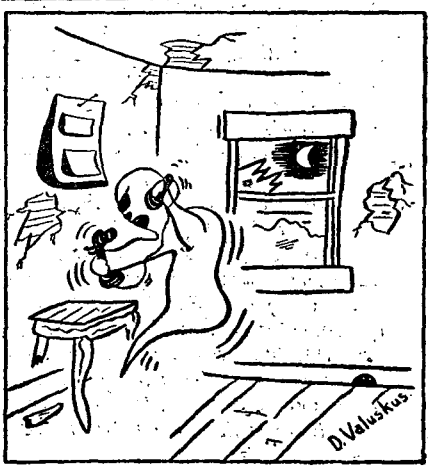
Mar, Apr, May & June '50. *Jim Phillips*, 1458 *W. Wilson Ave, Chicago* 40, *Ill* . . . For sale or trade: Twice In Time, Alien Intelligence, Chessboard Of Mars (all 3 in one volume, paper-backed); pocket books Hold Your Breath, Lost God and Other Stories. Will trade for or buy: Feb, Mar, July & Aug '50 aSF. A. Siemon, 548 E. Broadway, Girard, Ohio . . . *Anthony Lauria, Jr.*, 873 *E* 181 *St, New York* 60, *N Y wants*: *aSF* '46 & '47; *Fantasy & SF* 1 & 3; *Land of Unreason*; *pb's Time Trap, Murder Of The USA*; *aSF Mar* '48 & *Mar* '49; *IMAGINATION Feb*, '51; *Marvel May* '51; *AS Feb* '48. *Will sell or trade*: *aSF Nov* '49; *OW Mar* '50; *Galaxy Oct* '50 . . . Eldon K. Everett, P. O. Box 513, Tacoma, Wash. has the following items for sale or will trade for British Burroughs pocket books: Green Mouse, Chambers, 1st ed., good, $3.50; Sea Fairies and Sky Island, L. F. Baum, will sell or trade as set only, $5; An Egyptian Love Spell, M. H. Billings, 1st ed., good, $3 . . . *Will sell or trade Titus Groan* (430 *page fantasy novel, d/w*) *by Mervyn Peake for The Man Who Sold The Moon by Heinlein; Mr. Aladdin by Carlos Drake* (*d/w*) *for Sinister Barrier by E. F. Russell; The Yellow Room* (*d/w*) *by Mary Roberts Rinehart for Seetee Shock by Will Steward; The Last Trump* (*d/w*) *by Louis de Rougemont for The Humanoids by Jack Williamson* (*Simon & Shuster ed*). *Must have d/ws and be in good condition. Regis J. Murphy*, 932 *Lanterman Ave, Youngstown, Ohio* . . . Let's trade stf mags. Send 10 or 15 stf mags and $1. I will return an equal number, all different by return mail. Pocket books will be accepted. 1st issues and foreign mags count as two. All my items are in good condition with covers. Bill Deppe, 12 S. 6th St, Wilmington, N. Car . . . *A state-wide stf club for Texans is now circulating a round-robin letter for organizational purposes. Any Texas fan is invited to write to R. J. Banks Jr.*, 111 *S.* 15*th St, Corsicana, Texas, for further information. Banks is also announcing special all-professional, all-fiction issue of his fanzine Utopian. It will contain a minimum of* 12 *short stories, and will be a limited edition of* 300 *copies* . . Mrs. Lorena Laing would like to hear from any fans who have back issues of mags to give away or sell at a reasonable price. Her address is P. O. Box 654, Brownfield, Texas . . . *Would like to complete set of E. R. Burroughs books. Have Tarzan & Martian series but some of his other works are missing. Would appreciate list and prices and a statement of their condition. Also want AS, Feb & Apr* 'DB; *Blue Book, Apr* '40 & *Jan* '42; *Adventures, June* '40; *Thrilling Adventures Mar-May* '39. *State condition. Must have covers. Ronald L. Smith*, 332 *E. Date St., Oxnard, Calif.*



I tell you there's nobody home!

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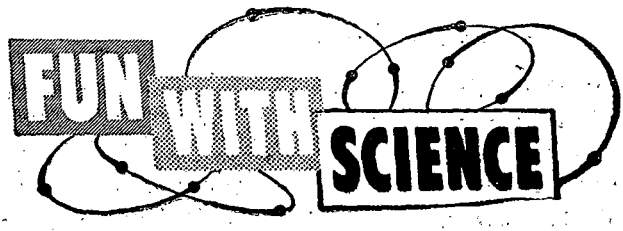

DR. Rhine of Duke University has made quite a sensation in his experiments with extra-sensory perception, known familiarly as ESP. First he proved that some people can tell what a card is merely from concentrating on the back of it. He proved that the card could be identified by what seems to be telepathy by having a person in one room look at the card and visualize it, while the subject, in another room, called it out. This could even be done hundreds of miles distant. Later he proved that not only the card being concentrated on could be identified, but following ones, or precognition, the ability to foretell the future. Then he proved that concentrating on the fall of dice could effect their fall, so that a better than average score could be made.

All this excited the gamblers. It seemed that a person with ESP could "break the bank" at Monte Carlo or anywhere else. If Dr. Rhine's research is valid, and many scientists admit it is, then we have the reason for many of the phenomenal runs of luck in cards, dice, etcetera.

But not so long ago two eminent science fiction scientists engaged in a duel which went as follows: They played gin-rummy for one month on the following setup: One participant was absolutely unaware of the fact that any experiment was going on, although all spectators, and there were many of them, were fully aware of it. The experiment was simple—a marked deck (called readers) was being used by the second party in the experiment. It was deemed that in Dr. Rhine's ESP, knowing what cards were coming, and being able to "see the other side" would give a gambler an advantage hard to beat. Thus, neither of the two participants having any ESP, deliberate cheating was employed.

Yes, you guessed it: at 1c per point, the participant who knew the deck was marked, who could read every card as it came up, LOST $63.00 in the month. For thirty days, each day, gin-rummy was played, before witnesses, for several hours. The result should have been obvious. It wasn't.

The conclusion? That ESP would not be a help against William L. Hamling, one of the participants in this case, and could only handicap the other, Ray Palmer! As he'd only know a larger than *average* percentage of pure guesses on the cards, not ALL of them.

Where does that put scientific in-

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vestigation, as done at Duke University? Hamling is laughing yet!

* * *

HOW old is the Earth? Let us quote a few of the answers given in textbooks available in any library: One billion years. Two billion years. One and one-half billion years. Five hundred fifty thousand years. Close to three billion years. Between ten billion and a trillion years. And if we are to use the Bible as a textbook, 5,955 years. Rocks give one answer, Radioactives give another, Fossils give a third, and Religion a fourth. OTHER WORLDS guess is 350,000 years with Man no older (and no younger) than 80,000 years. If you want to add your guess, you'll be number 5,690 on the list of guessers - - all experts!

* * *

It seems the captain of a certain spaceliner making the regular trip from Jupiter to Earth had a pet talking *spleuxgfyk* bird (not related to Earth's parrot which has only two feet) which he kept in a cage in the main salon. It also seems that each trip, on the last day out or in, an amateur show was staged in the salon, with members of the crew and passenger list taking part. Like most amateur shows, it was typically amateur, and the spleuxgfyk bird had been forced to sit (or stand, because it had so many feet it could not sit) through all of them. Naturally, it was very bored with the whole thing, and eventually adopted the practice of going to sleep as soon as the show began. He would tuck his three heads under his body and sit on them like a duck hatching eggs.

On this particular trip, the Captain became annoyed at the disinterest of his pet, and decided to get him into the act and force him to wake up. Accordingly he took a large sheet and threw it over the cage.

The spleuxgfyk poked one of its heads out from under its belly and observed the covering. It winked one eye sleepily, then muttered a "Thanks, Cap" and went back to sleep, thinking the Captain had been thoughtful enough to provide him with at least some protection from the show, visual if not audible.

Accordingly the spleuxgfyk did not see the passes the Captain was making over his cage. Nor did he see the sheet being whipped off by the Captain with a terrific flourish. For that matter, neither did the audience.

For at that moment a huge meteor smashed through the ship.

Instantly the lights went out. All was confusion. Women and men screamed. Women because they were afraid, and men because they were - - afraid. There was the shrill whistle of escaping air, the banging of bulkhead doors, sealing off the damaged compartments, the hoarse shouts of the Captain ordering the abandonment of ship, the heaving and pitching as the ship turned end over end in space, the pandemonium as the artificial gravity went haywire, the roar of exploding rockets

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astern, the whine of overloaded generators.

As the Captain struggled into his space suit, he yelled orders to passengers to do the same. He even helped one fat man squeeze into one, then ran to take charge of the lifeboats. Then he ran back, gathered up the cage with the spleuxgfyk in it, and literally hurled it into a lifeboat. At that instant a terrific explosion rent the ship in twain, and blew the port of the lifeboat shut with the spleuxgfyk inside and the Captain outside.

Another terrific explosion came, and the liner was literally blown to bits. The spleuxgfyk found himself drifting in the lifeboat in space, surrounded by the most collossal array of debris he had ever seen. Not even the memorable amateur show staged on the 78th Voyage had been as badly fouled up.

Beside the lifeboat floated the awkwardly kicking body of the Captain, still in his space suit: His helmet was cracked, and air was leaking out in a fine spurt of snow.

The spleuxgfyk had removed one of his three heads from beneath his belly, and now, as a rocket-fuel tank floating in space exploded in a tremendous glare of light that lit up the whole array of shattered debris, and revealed the Captain's frantic efforts to reach the lifeboat, another of the spleuxgfyk's heads came out, registering a reluctant degree of interest.

Then, as the Captain's helmet burst altogether, and his head disappeared in a froth in the vacuum, the spleuxgfyk's third head came erect with decided interest on its features.

As all three heads turned around and around, surveying the incredible scene, they began to nod in approval, even expressing audible huzzah's at the Captain's final exhibition.

But as nothing further happened, one of the heads looked a bit disappointed, and began to tuck itself back for a few more winks - - but t h e n a b r u p t l y brightened and straightened up.

With a loud squawk of anticipation it looked out at the Captain's floating body. "Okay, Cap. Now let's see you put it together!"

* * *

At the Westercon (science fiction convention June 29 and 30 at San Francisco) somebody described Dianetics as "push button psychology." Whereupon he chortled:

"You push the button here,
The engrams go 'round and 'round,
And you come out clear!"

Help! Help! This column depends on its readers! Do you know any good sf jokes? Have you had any funny experiences in science fiction? Can you give a gentle rib to science? Can you make us laugh? Got any cartoons? If you do, you can make this column worthwhile. This is its first appearance, and even Bea Mahaffey will admit the only thing that's funny about Ray Palmer is his editing. Help him out!

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LETTERS

WILLIAM J. DOHERTY, JR.

I have just finished reading the September issue of your wonderful mag. I can't tell how much I enjoyed Russell's "The Witness". Next in line was "A Word From Our Sponsor". I'd like to see more of Brown. "Down In The Misty Mountains" had a good plot, but in my opinion, it ranks third. By the way, what was that on page 144?

Being a new reader, I'd like to know what's all the noise about back issues? I mean before 1940. Were they really better than today's s-f magazines? Having little capital and less time, I've never really bothered to find out. Anybody got an old pulp with a few stories in it they'd like to send me? Before I close, one last request. Put some staples in the magazine.

23 Florence St.,
Cambridge 39, Mass.

Floyd Scrilch, on page 144 of the September issue, was a parody on the new "science" of Dianetics. Nothing is sacred to OTHER WORLDS!

As for back issues, and how much better they were, bosh, William. They weren't. The rush for them is because science fiction collections are a hobby, and are worth money, like stamps.

We're installing new machinery to make the binding more substantial. Maybe this issue will show you what we mean. *Ed.*

RONALD D. RENTZ

I have read science fiction for a number of years, but have never been an active fan. Now, however, I am interested in joining one of the many fan clubs in existence. It would be appreciated if some of your readers would send me the details of a few good ones. I was very much interested in the one mentioned by Robert Hoskins in the September letters column. However, he gave no address to write to. I think your mag is great. I happened to start reading it quite by accident. During my vacation I felt like reading some SF so I went down to the nearest store and looked through the stock of science magazines. Your Sept. cover made me buy yours because I figured anyone that can get articles by well-known men like Willy Ley and Eric Frank Russell must put out a darn good issue. After I had read every page in it, I was sold on your magazine for life.

130 Vera Street
West Hartford 7, Conn.

Robert P. Hoskins, Lyons Falls, N.Y. (there's your address, Ronald). *Ed.*

PFC ALBEN HOLLINGSWORTH

Having read scientification magazines for a number of years, I think

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it is about time I put in my two cents. I have followed your mag for the whole time it has been in print. I like. *OW* and *Imagination* are way up there. The September issue in particular. Rating: "Down In The Misty Mountains". An adventure story, fast moving, with a good ending. Illustrations by Cartier as usual - - unsurpassed. "A Word From Our Sponsor." Deep with meaning, well written and above all, true. "The Witness." Mediocre — enough said. "My Struggle". Deserves no comment. I will continue to buy OW. It sure helps a lonely service man when he is not in class. ASF is better, but has been going longer. If you keep going at this rate, you'll be on top of the heap.

AF12375436
Box 975, 3411 Stud. Sqdn.
Keesler AFB, Miss.

Thanks, Alben. We like loyal readers like you. Your support helps us to keep on improving. Ed.

DON WILSON

Well, I do believe it is time to be writing my annual letter of comment to your most imaginative, galactic magazine. You editors are *so* lucky.

"Down In The Misty Mountains" by Joe Gibson. Well, it's like this. You see, in China, the family name is first. Thus, if a Chinese name were Yin Chao-tang (it's customary, by the way, not to capitalize the second half of the second name), Yin is his family name. Yin Chao-tang and Wu Chao-tang wouldn't be brothers. It would be like saying Jimmy Jones and Jimmy Smith had the same family name. Shame on you, Gibson.

But it was a nice story, I note that it strayed rather far afield from its original locale and content, however. The first half of the thing was rather disconnected, as if Gibson were unsure just what he wanted to say next, and then once he got onto the Venusian idea he really began to click. It's refreshing to read such a simple, well-put-together story.

The fannish names were amusing, too. Pirate MacSneary is something I can well imagine.

The editorial says you're going in for longer stories. This is without a doubt the most welcome news I have read in the past two years. What do I see? Astounding - - no more serials. Marvel - - the readers prefer short-shorts. Well, you and Gold and Hamling are on the ball.

Don't give up the short stories, however. I think that the last couple of years have been the first in science-fiction's history when the shorts have been readable. Your two in this issue are good examples of the New Era, when shorts are no longer merely fillers. Ah well, Russell and Brown are good writers.

The sweetest thing of all in this issue is Cartier's matchless illustrations, which are gorgeous, beautiful, superlative, and downright goshwow-boyoboy. All Cartier is the best thing that you could have happen to you.

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On the cover, now, you may (you have my permission) continue to use Settles and Smith and Mac.

And Galaxy makes such a fuss about its wash drawings.

Floyd Scrilch's adventure was a mite impossible, since this boy underwent "The Weird Doom Of Floyd Scrilch" in Fantastic Adventures back in 1942 or some such time, and dead men can't have adventures. But Bloch is a treasure, anyway. I'm glad to see that you're not practising neutralism (the curse applied to countries which won't follow the USA) with regard to St. LRon's goat-hormone panacea.

Ley was good too. How about running one of your inside cover stories on your boss?

Cal Hall, UR
Redlands, Calif.

OW is always willing to oblige its readers whenever possible - - here's your cover feature on Rap, almost before you asked for it, Don. And as for the point you bring up regarding Chinese names, "Hey, Gibson, what have you got to say about this?" So Bloch killed off Floyd Scrilch years ago, did he? Now that you mention it, we do remember the story. Scrilch had a penchant for getting in trouble by answering ads way back then, too. But let's be reasonable, Don, just because one John Jones dies doesn't mean that all people named John Jones cease to exist. Let's give Bloch (and your editors' memories) the benefit of the doubt and assume that this is a new and different Floyd Scrilch. Ed.

JERRY SYMMONDS

I have just finished the September OW and didn't stop once. Need I say more?

I would like to be one of the first to say that I agree wholeheartedly with your opinions on science-fiction which you stated in no roundabout fashion in your editorial, and I also feel that most fans take the same attitude.

Hurray for the coming policy of longer stories. I thoroughly enjoyed the Gibson story and hope to see many longer stories in OW.

The cover was great. I always had a weakness for covers with spaceships, rockets, and scientific whatzits and doohickies. Let's have more.

The stories, with the possible exception of "A Word From Our Sponsor", were very enjoyable. Willy Ley's article was also good and I would like to see more like it in the future.

Box 150
Lockwood, Mo.

In line with our longer story policy, we are presenting Richard Ashby's 38,000 word serial (in two parts) and beginning next issue, Rog Phillips' 76,000 word story "These Are My Children". In passing, we want to comment on Phillips' new novel: DON'T MISS IT! In our opinion it is the finest novel to appear in science fiction bar none. Naturally we could mention a dozen other

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terrific novels, but we'd be UNABLE to say they were any more than equal to it. BUT, this one's something we think has more than just entertainment in it, or scientific "newness", or daring concept - - it faces the crisis before humanity squarely, for the first time! It is a prophetic story in the TIME HONORED TRADITION of science fiction, first set by the old Aristocrat, AMAZING STORIES. This one makes us proud that we are science fiction fans. Proud that we are editors with another bulls-eye to chalk down on our list of worthy achievements. Proud to know that a writer we developed has come to his full and magnificent maturity. But most important, this story will thrill you, satisfy you, add to your mental stature and your memories of good things, more than anything else you have read recently. PLEASE don't miss it, you readers of all s-f! Ray Palmer knows what he's talking about, here! Believe me!

As for covers, what do you think of the cover this issue? And if you do, don't miss the March cover! We've really got something coming, almost every issue! Our cover schedule is the most exciting we've ever contemplated in fourteen years of scheduling them! Next issue is a Mac Girl.—Ed.

HERBERT KUSHNER

(The editor apologizes for cutting out how lousy you think Gibson and Bloch were — so's we can get to the meat of your letter. We don't usually cut adverse comment, but we gotta have room to answer you!)

One short but seemingly important sentence in this September editorial intrigued me. To quote: "It (sf) *does* say 'here's how it can be' and it also says "here's how it will be'."

I, personally, disagree—at least partially. Stating that science fiction presents possbility ("can be") is repetition of an easily evident fact. However, stating that sf, in any respect whatsoever, presents certainty ("will be") is, in my opinion, a serious misinterpretation of the field as it exists today.

No writer, no reader, of sf can say "here's how it will be," because such a statement is limited, by human ability if nothing else, to God or at least one of Doc Smith's Arisians with visualization of the Cosmic All.

Science fiction does not now, nor will it ever, have the ability to prophesy the FUTURE, the future of "will be." What science fiction *can* do—and *does* do so admirably—is predict *a* future, one of the infinity of "can be's" that exist as a product of men's minds. And that is where sf's mission (if indeed sf has any such) lies. In the "can be's" and, only *indirectly*, in the "will be", for inability to prophesy the FUTURE does not necessarily imply complete lack of control over it. (I refer you to John W. Campbell's editorial in the November 1949 issue of aSF, in which he made this very excellent

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point: the mere existence of an idea as such is the first, and perhaps the hardest, step toward the existence of that idea as material actuality.)

Thus, if enough people are warned fictionally of the inescapable result of atomic warfare, atomic warfare will be opposed by just that many more people; and, in a like manner, if five sf authors write five stories giving five different space drives or space drive modifications, and if these authors have injected any scientific plausibility at all into their stories, space drive research will be richer by five ideas. There you have "can be's" affecting "will be". And while such a case is obviously rigged, the principle nevertheless holds true: tell—or warn—enough people about something enough times and those people will start thinking; and when the time comes to put that something into practice, thought will have brought results.

Such is my disagreement.

Nevertheless, you did make a statement in the same editorial that holds true to anyone with the slightest insight into the wonderful thing that science fiction can be—and usually is.

Science fiction *is* prophecy with a vengeance. Could be that the future is science fiction with a vengeance too!

1501 W. Lexington St.
Baltimore 23, Md.

Let's base our reply to you on your OWN authority, John W. Campbell. Refer to his own statement, then follow me: An actuality is a reality. An actual thing is a real thing. It is a "be." Thus, the idea of a thing is a "will be" BECAUSE it is the FIRST step (in a series of steps) toward MATERIAL ACTUALITY. I am glad I did not have to make that point on my OWN authority, although it is one of my FIRM tenets of existence. Now, let's go further down the same road: An idea is a reality, being the first step of a reality. Thus if a writer presents an idea (you say based in plausibility—you mean, no doubt, based on OTHER and PREVIOUS ideas, but no matter) based or unbased, it is a REALITY. Thus, it is a "will be" and CAN BE NOTHING ELSE. Actually Campbell is a philosopher. Out of philosophy comes science. Philosophy is the eyes of reality, Science is the legs. Neither can go anywhere wthout the other. Remember the old fable of the blind man and the legless man who got along very well together? Campbell repeated a tenet of all mystics all over the world. Personally, I agree with him, being rather a mystic myself. I believe in the reality of thought. A part of a chair is the concept of it. Remove the concept and the chair no longer exists, wood, glue and nails notwithstanding. I say SCIENCE FICTION is a statement of the WILL BE. But I won't base this on just my say-so. I will take up your challenge. I will write a story, for publication in a future

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issue, which will be labeled a WILL BE. And I will personally write what I think will be facts, and if they are not facts within one year after publication, I will eat the pages of the story at the sf convention held the followng year, and further, will pay your transportation to that convention to see me eat it!

Naturally, if it DOES come true, you will pay my transportation and yourself do the eating. Are you game? Will you back up your disagreement?

By the way, OTHER WORLDS' pulp paper is edible!

And now, on my own . . . it is absolutely true that we can control the future with our ideas. It is not *true that a large variety of ideas mean a large variety of "possibilities." There is only ONE future, and ALL ideas together will make that future "be." ALL of today's ideas about space drives will result in (1) ONE space drive, then any new ideas will MODIFY it, resulting in OTHER space drives. (2) There may be A DIVISION of ideas resulting in two or three space drives, perhaps, simultaneously, but they will be ONE FUTURE, involving ALL of us, not TWO FUTURES in parallel. Or perhaps your concept does not make such an obvious comment? If I misinterpret your letter, my apologies. I admire a reader who HAS ideas, and one of them I agree with — stf has no "mission." How silly! A "mission" would imply a previously planned future outside our own ideas. Or that we are puppets of an unknown destiny. No, sf is merely an expression of ideas. I think they are REAL ideas.*

Your letter closes by saying sf IS prophecy. By that you mean the ideas of sf DO control the future, but that a complexity of them modify the future reality. You modify the "will be" to the "can be." There is no "can be." Imagine yourself living in a universe in a perpetual state of "could be only it ain't yet." No, the Universe, no matter where we look, is a "be" and it WAS a "will be" in the past. Just WHOSE idea made it what it is, isn't my purpose to argue at all. You call it God. I have "ideas" on that myself, and I call it Man. I think God is made in Man's image, at least the God most religions picture to us. As for the REAL God, I think He's BEYOND concept. FOREVER beyond. So there is no sense in trying to advance ideas concerning Him, other than the oldest of all ideas, that God is ALL. All takes in a lot of territory, you'll agree, than which there is no more. — Your science fiction philosopher, Rap.

MARIAN C. H. SCHLOEDER

I am reading my second issue of OW and enjoy it very much, but must confess that your Letters department annoys me very much, as they all seem to think that *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Galaxy* are the only sf magazines worth reading, except your own; and even *you*

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must take second or third place to them.

I have been readng and reveling in sf for a long time, but I should like to bring out the fact that enjoyable as OW is, there is another magazine that is tops in my estimation This is *The Magazine Of Fantasy And Science Fiction,* edited by Anthony Boucher, who is undoubtedly one of the most human and versatile of men and editors. There are many of us who enjoy his literary *ragouts;* he hits every mood and tempo, with an emphasis on a satiric sense of humor.

I think you will be honest enough to admit that very few of the sf magazines have a *light* quality. And in these times a story with a smile can feel very good indeed.

I should like to request that you, too, indulge in a little chuckle-binge once in awhile. If it comes to the worst (and believe me it *would* be the worst) I shall write one for you myself.

I think Robert Bloch would be able to do the trick for you. Or Theodore Sturgeon. I have seen some of their more humorous efforts in *Suspense* and they were very good indeed.

I am not praising F&SF to your detriment. You work a different field. And in one way, you are to be the higher praised. Your stuff is ALL *new.* But I like their idea that if there is no more new *best* available, they'll give us reprints and give their readers the best anyway. And their careful blending of all types of fiction with the necessary leavening of humor always makes for a wonderful issue.

This is a hastily compiled protest, and quite true, it hasn't been polished. I have no expectations of having the letter printed. I just wanted to make my point—to emphasize quality *plus* humor. And I hope you'll realize that I am writing you because I genuinely love OW and want to see it continue tops.

17 E. Garfield Ave.,
Atlantic Highlands, N. J.

We love you too! Because you're so deliciously womanlike — inconsistent. No slam, there, Marian. We LIKE our women the way you are! You get annoyed, then womanlike do exactly the thing that annoys you—place F&SF ahead of OW. Sure it is—in its field! As for Anthony Boucher, we've loved him for years. He IS tops. And you DID make your point. We like humor too, and darned if we aren't going to try to get more of it for you. JUST for you, which is manlike. We men are suckers for you girls! We'll do anything to please you. Then, womanlike, you turn around and say TWICE that we are TOPS, in spite of your remark about F&SF. Well, in reality, you ARE consistent, because you place all these "tops" in different categories, which is where they SHOULD be placed. In short, Marian, you're a smart girl, and we agree with you thoroughly.

THE END

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

A rather new organization in S-F fandom is the Fan-Vet's organization. We hear that it will hold its second annual convention in April, 1952. Exact date to be announced soon, and we'll give it to you in OW. All fans in the armed forces are asked to contact the Fan-Vets so that Fan-Vet services can be made available to them. Write Ray Van Houten, 127 Spring Streets, Patterson 3, N. J.

NEA is launching a science comic strip this November (tentatively). Watch Editor and Publisher for full announcement. It is drawn by Art Sansom, and the script is by Russ Winterbotham (also known as R.R. Winterbotham, stf writer). The name of the strip is Chris Welkin. Chris from Columbus, explorer, and "welkin" meaning Heavens.

The Canadian Science Fiction Assn. Newsletter No. 2 is out. If you're interested in it, write Chester D. Cuthbert, 54 Ellesmere Ave., St. Vital, Manitoba, Canada.

As this page goes to press, OTHER WORLDS' managing editor, Bea Mahaffey, is attending the science fiction convention at New Orleans. Her itinery includes a trip to Florida, a visit at her home in Cincinnati, and, of course, the Nolacon.

Howard Browne, editor of *Amazing Stories*, has just returned from a vacation in California where he tied up a few of the top writers in the Hollywood area.

Bill Hamling, of *Imagination* spent a week in Wisconsin, stopping off at Ray Palmer's farm. Ray took him fishing and Bill caught an 18" black bass weighing 3 lbs., 4 ounces, and a speckled trout 17 and a half inches and weighing just under two pounds. Bill went into the far north and got skunked in his effort to beat the fishing at Palmer's! P.S. There ain't no better!

S. J. Byrne is finishing up a new novel related to his Prometheus II and Colossus I, II, III series. It is reputed to be a real sensation-getter.

Science fiction movies is the next BIG deal for Hollywood. It will shade anything Hollywood has ever done in the field of the spectacular. This is due to the tremendous "sets" necessary to film really good stf. Hollywood plans to invest millions in what it thinks a "sure thing." Welcome news to stf readers!

Two new magazines are on the "planning board" of the Clark Publishing Co. One will interest science fiction fans.

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The People Who Make OTHER WORLDS

NO. 1. The Editor

RAYMOND A. Palmer (better known as "Rap") was born August 1, 1910 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. From the first he was one of those persons known by insurance companies as having a tendency toward accidents. At 7 he suffered a broken back in an auto accident. Those years were years of reading Edgar Rice Burroughs, every book as it came off the press; Jules Verne, Henty, H. Rider Haggard, H. G. Wells, Jack London, Serviss.

At 13, two more years in bed. At 20, the back again. More hospital. Falls off roofs, off ladders.

But at 16, the great event of his life—the discovery of his first copy of *Amazing Stories* on the newsstand. Within six months he grew impatient with the magazine, as he saw so much that he wanted it to be. Decided then and there, at 17, to become editor of the magazine. In 1937, quit his job as a sheet metal worker to *wait*. Nobody understood. But in February 1938 came a fateful telegram. February 14, 1938 he became managing editor of *Amazing Stories*.

At Ziff-Davis, publishers of *Amazing Stories*, his self-training in writing since 17 (first story sold to Hugo Gernsback in 1928) which counted sales to *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories*, *Wonder Stories* and many other magazines including murder, gangster, sex, western, mystery and flying—proved of inestimable value. Over 3,000,000 published words backed up his story sense. *Amazing Stories* rose from lowest in sales to highest. Founded *Fantastic Adventures* and also became editor of five other magazines.

In 1949 he resigned from Ziff-Davis to publish his own magazines, the first of which was FATE (based on the unusual, ala Fort) and OTHER WORLDS. In 1950 founded IMAGINATION.

June 4, 1950 saw him paralyzed from the waist down by an accidental fall. Doctors agreed, permanent paralysis. But it wasn't.

Ray Palmer is a believer in the impossible. He believed Jesse James still living, sent John Shevlin, greatest living detective, to track him down. He prodded, Kenneth Arnold's flying saucers into national headlines for two years, was accused by Project Saucer of fostering a tremendous hoax.

He doesn't consider his readers customers, regards them as friends—knows thousands of them personally. Intends to spend the rest of his life trying to entertain them with his magazines, of which they haven't seen the last.

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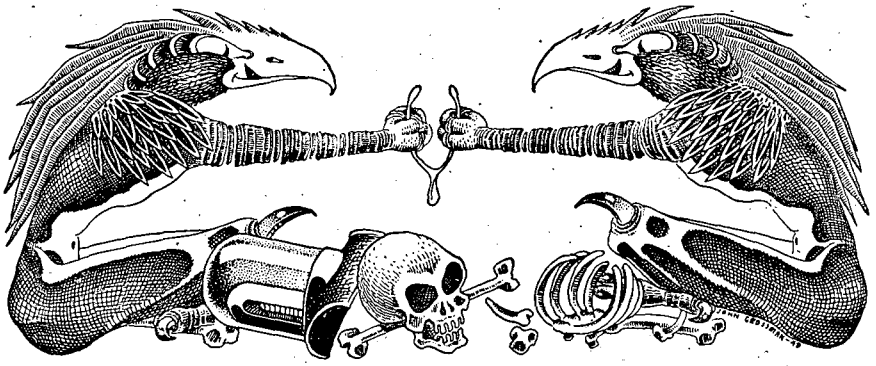

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